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The road has always been the scene of great exploits for Dawes. With Audax bikes at our heart the new generation of 3IMA (pronounced "three-ma") are the latest incarnation of our year round, go anywhere fast day riding bikes. Perfectly at ease as a fast commuter, winter trainer or the spot of light "credit card" touring these top line machines can open up a whole world of adventure.



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- › Shimano BR-785 Hydraulic road disc brakes
- › Shimano Ultegra 50/34T compact crank
- › Fizik Arione road saddle
- › Ritchey Comp 3D forged seatpost

- › SKS Chromoplastic mudguards with ASR release and Zeta stays
- › Schwalbe Durano 700 x 28C tyres with Raceguard
- › Shimano RX31 centrelock QR wheelset



View 360° images of the complete 2015 Dawes 3IMA range at:
www.dawescycles.com



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THIS MONTH

MAY ISSUE 71

DO THIS...

Ride an Adventure Cross this year

We've got five Adventure Cross events for you to enjoy this year and if this fast growing on/off-road sportive challenge is new to you, now is the chance to block out a Sunday with a big X in it.

What is Adventure Cross? We thought the best person to explain the concept was CA fitness editor Hannah Reynolds, who has just returned from a route recce expedition to the second round of the series, the Afan Avenger, in South Wales on Sunday May 10: "Planning an Adventure Cross route takes some serious consideration and Gav MacDonald, our course designer, has done a fabulous job on this route to make sure it takes in the full variety the valleys can offer.

"Riding in wilderness areas far away from busy roads is one of the greatest appeals of these events, as they take you away into the hills to discover a mixture of different terrains.

"Adventure Cross routes go to places not accessible on road bikes but allow you to cover more ground than a mountain bike route would.

"The routes combine a mix of quiet rural roads, cycle paths, trailways, bridleways and a smidgen of technical stuff, just to keep you on your toes.

"Wales has some seriously steep climbs so we heartily recommend you think about your gearing. If you are on a cross bike it would be worth considering fitting a mountain bike cassette so that you have lower gears available when the going gets tough!"

"For some sections those on cross bikes will have the advantage but on others it will be the mountain bikers with the upper hand. Choose your weapon wisely!"

See page 128 for the 2015 Adventure Cross series and enter online at www.bookmyride.co.uk



CAFE

CYCLING ACTIVE FRONT END

What's on... May 2

The Dartmoor Demon Sportive is the third event in *Cycling Weekly's* 2015 Sportive Series. Routes are 55 and 95 miles long and both cross the Haldon Forest and Dartmoor National Park. www.bookmyride.co.uk



3 TOP SPORTIVE TIPS

- Service your bike a week before the event
- Invest in a good, comfortable chamois (padded insert) in your shorts
- Try all nutrition products before event day to avoid nasty surprises!

IN

Cycle to work scheme

More than 180,000 people signed up to their employers' cycle to work scheme in 2014, an 11.6 per cent increase on the previous year.

Spring Wattbiking

Indoor training is fun and has been safer than sliding on ice this winter. Up your time outdoors this spring but don't forget the indoor bike entirely.

High vis

With bright colours from brands like Rapha, Castelli and B'Twin, they're all putting safety, and fashion, first this spring.



Eating right

Unless you're Bradley Wiggins and his team of experts, fasted riding can be dangerous. Only restrict calories when you're not out on your bike.

Drinking too much... water

Experts are warning that 'waterlogging' the body during exercise could be more dangerous than not drinking enough, according to research published in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Extreme detox

According to the *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, "Although the detox industry is booming, there is very little clinical evidence to support the use of these diets."

Boring nutrition

With leading nutrition companies like Powerbar and Clif coming up with energy sweets, and SiS the mint chocolate Rego protein bar, technical nutrition's never tasted so good.

Getting cold

We assume by this time of year that it's our right to wear shorts, but this is the UK, so if the temperature dips, layer up and don't get cold to the core.



OUT



Political cowardice

Labour and Tories dodge spending commitments at cycling debate

Laura Laker

The UK's first pre-election cycling debate, hosted by the *Times* newspaper in its offices in London Bridge, was predictably frustrating, with two of the three major parties refusing to commit £10 per head per year, the figure considered the minimum required to kick-start mass cycling in the UK.

Pressed by Chris Boardman to commit a percentage of the transport budget to cycling, the Tories and Labour wouldn't do that either.

The Conservatives "aspire" to £10 per head, but they haven't said when this might happen. Only the Lib Dems have committed to spend £10 per year, rising to £20, with targets to increasing cycling to 20 per cent of journeys by 2025, 25 per cent by 2050.

Mass utility cycling is a win-win for health, the environment and improving life in our congested town centres, with an impressive estimated £1:£6 investment return. However, cycling is not planned for — or funded — long-term the way roads, rail and aviation are planned for, and without this, councils can't plan meaningfully for cycling.

So why, as Boardman put it, is cycling being treated as a charitable cause, receiving only sporadic chunks of cash, when we are drowning in the evidence of its benefits?

Cycling, unfortunately, is portrayed in this

country as the transport of a small, even elite few, a view perpetuated ad nauseam in the nation's media.

It could be called the *Daily Mail* effect, but it's certainly not limited to one newspaper.

In September the *Telegraph* published an article listing seven 'mad' Lib Dem policies, of which, gallingly, their cycling targets was one.

Then, in January, the Conservatives accused Labour of proposing to spend £63m on cycling, a claim Labour said was "just nonsense", as if it had been caught doing something wrong.

Perhaps it was the pre-empting of negative headlines that spawned this race to the bottom.

Perhaps it's hard to argue for spending money on infrastructure for those too scared to cycle yet, but that's hardly an excuse.

Unlike places like Holland and Denmark where everyone from eight to 80 cycles, to many in the UK this is inconceivable. "Look at the casualties," our media says. "You'd have to be crazy to cycle."

The fact that in big cities cycling is as safe as walking doesn't feature.

However, to its credit the *Times*, among other major newspapers, has campaigned for safer cycling for years. The question is, when will politicians ignore the scaremongering element and put their money where their mouth is?

Infrastructure Act marks 'massive' turning point for cycling

A clause within the Infrastructure Act, passed in February, means the government is required by law to set out a strategy for cycling and walking, with funding. How each of the parties will interpret this, however, remains to be seen.

Nonetheless Chris Boardman

told CA the infrastructure bill was "massive", and despite slow progress he struck an optimistic note.

"Now we cannot do nothing, we are legally required to do something and that's a big step, that's a foundation stone, I think. It's the fact it's a commitment

and it's a budget line and it's going to be there in two years' time, and 10 years' time, and people can rely on it," he said.

"The most important thing is that we're actually here having this conversation in the biggest newspaper in the country [the *Times*] and talking about what we're going to do for cycling. What's being said is just edging millimetre by millimetre in the right direction."

Psssst!

Puncture? Use new app Kerbi to summon your nearest approved puncture repair operative. Keep hands clean and make new friends! www.kerbi.uk

£100m **Kerching!** Price tag for Evans Cycles which is up for sale. Evans Cycles was started in 1921, has 56 stores and employs 1,200 staff.

3 silvers

Britain's worst performance in the World Track Championships since 2001, the last time GB came away without a gold medal. Tenth in the medal table in Paris puts the heat on the superstars of British sport as Rio 2016 looms large.

I RIDE TO LIVE

Hitesh Pankhania

Age: 22

Job: Just finished university

Home: Slough

Bikes: Condor Heritage and my dad's old Peugeot racing bike



Hitesh: We're cousins who are cycling home from Bali. We have taken one year off to travel more than 10,000 miles across about 24 different countries. This is especially difficult for us, as we'd barely done any cycling before we started — I'd estimate we'd done about 700 miles in total before the trip!

When Vivek approached me with the idea, I didn't know anything about cycle touring.

Now I think it's one of the best ways to see the world. We grew up reading tales of adventures from the *Famous Five*, but somewhere along the line, we lost that feeling of adventurousness. I thought this was the perfect time in my life to go on an adventure of my own.

We also wanted to raise money for the fantastic children's cancer charity CLIC Sargent. They were a huge help to my family when my younger sister was diagnosed with cancer four years ago.

Vivek: While I was on holiday in the summer of 2013, I read an article about a man who decided to cycle from England to Australia to watch the Ashes. I thought that that was a great idea. In terms of cycling experiences so far, Sumatra was definitely the most interesting and challenging. The tough terrain and exceptional vistas made it a great experience, and the people are so welcoming. It was amazing the number of times a local would direct us or even help us out

in some way with food and drink. I must confess, though, that getting to Singapore — being back in a big city — was perfectly timed.

The only thing we both know at this stage is that we need to be home for September 2015 to start work again. Although we have a rough route mapped out, we have no fixed ideas. For example, when we got to Thailand, we weren't sure whether to continue north through Laos or head towards Cambodia and Vietnam. We both definitely want to cycle the Pamir highway through central Asia, so I doubt that part will change very much, but our route in Europe could be anything — except for the part where we make it back to London.



WD-40 from £4.99

We've all heard of WD-40 but perhaps not the vast range of products the brand has just for bikes. Designed for taking care of the pride and joy all year round, WD-40 claims its bike range is "the result of extensive testing and development", working closely with cycling pros and experts.

www.raleigh.co.uk/Brands/WD-40



P20 sun protection from £12

If you're lucky enough to be heading away to ride in a sunny climate, or if you're starting to bare flesh here in the UK, it's crucial to protect your skin. P20 promises to offer 10 hours of sun protection, with UVA and UVB filters, after just one application. Great for cycling as you don't need to take a bottle in your pocket.

www.p20.co.uk



Zeosoft Natural hand cleaner £6.99

Any cyclist who's spent an age untangling a crunched-up chain will know full well that soap and water simply doesn't cut it. Zeosoft Natural is a New Zealand-based brand, and its products offer heavy-duty hand cleaning using active natural minerals that it says care for both your skin and the environment.

www.raleigh.co.uk/Brands/Zeosoft



LoMo backpack £29.99

This 30-litre, high-visibility Dry Bag backpack features fluorescent yellow PVC material and several retro reflective chevrons to give you the best chance of being seen out on the road. A roll-top closure keeps things simple and means your belongings stay dry. A nice and practical commuting solution.

www.ewetsuits.com



Lusso Leggero thermal jacket £75

Designed for spring (or autumn), this is a good item for that intermediate stage when there's still a nip in the air but you don't want a heavy-duty jacket. From British brand Lusso comes the Leggero with four pockets, a full zip and reflective details. Thermal, breathable and available in four colour options.

www.lusso.bike



DHB women's halter bibs £64.99

Designed for a speedy comfort break, we were keen to see DHB's latest bibshorts. The Wiggle in-house clothing range is always modestly priced and the technology on offer provides plenty of performance clout. We'll be trying out the halter neck offering so look our for the full women's bibshorts test coming soon.

www.wiggle.co.uk



Yu! snacks from £0.45

Bike riding gives us a great excuse to have more satisfying snacks, and we're always on the lookout for a healthy way to refuel. Made from real fruit and wholesome, natural ingredients, and free from artificial flavourings, colourings and preservatives are these pocket-friendly fruit and granola packs from Yu!

www.yu-rules.co.uk



POC Octal AVIP MIPS helmet 2015 £284.99

POC products look the business and have been among our style picks for a while now. But the latest technology is an exciting development, with the new range offering the patented multi-directional impact protection (MIPS) system, which claims to reduce rotational forces to the brain in the case of an oblique impact.

www.2pure.co.uk



Michelin Pro4 Endurance 28mm £41.99

Yes, you read that right — 28mm is fat. This width signals the French tyre giant's intention to take on the oversize road tyre market. Aimed at the sports rider rather than the all-out racer, the Endurance range boasts a dual-compound tread offering high levels of grip and improved puncture protection. Available in black only.

www.michelin.co.uk

Equilibrium

With a frame handmade from Reynolds 725 Heat-Treated chromoly and kitted out with Mavics' Aksium One Disc wheelset, a Shimano 105-based drivetrain and the revolutionary ST-RS685 shifters, combining 11sp mechanical shifting and dedicated hydraulic braking, the striking new Equilibrium Disc Ltd can walk the talk and talk the talk.

But with only one run being made, you'll have to move fast!

Equilibrium Disc Ltd - SRP £1849.99



GENESIS

genesisbikes.co.uk

For more information visit genesis.co.uk or facebook.com/GenesisBikesUK

3.5 tons The lower weight limit of lorries which, from this September, must be fitted with side guards and mirrors as part of London's Safer Lorry Scheme comes into force. Non-compliance can result in a fine up to £1,000

40 days and nights

The Bishop of Ramsbury has given up his car for Lent and is using his bike for most of his pastoral visits around Wiltshire. The Right Reverend Dr Edward Condry gets about on a Pashley roadster with Sturmey Archer hub gears

London Bike Show: celebration of cycling

Cycling is booming in Britain, as proven by the fans swarming to the London Bike show this February

The London Bike Show returned to the capital's Excel Exhibition Centre this February, with cyclists queuing out of the door as the exhibition opened to the public. More attendees than ever flocked to see the show's highlights that included some of the most exciting guests to date. With 50,271 visitors over four days, figures reveal attendance is up by 11 per cent year-on-year.

With names like Britain's most decorated Olympian Sir Chris Hoy and Team Sky principal Sir Dave Brailsford gracing the Eurosport stage, and all the biggest, global bike brands exhibiting, it felt like a real celebration of where cycling is in the UK.

Hoy and Brailsford have both been huge contributors to the cycling boom in Britain, and it was interesting that both focused on the

topic of mass cycling participation, before chatting about winning gold medals and the Tour de France. Both spoke about how far the sport has progressed at all levels since they took on their respective roles at British Cycling. It was evident that seeing the nation take to two wheels was just as important to them as their extensive list of accolades and achievements.

From the fringes

Ten years ago cycling was an unknown sport to most people, and what's more, it was far from cool, something even Dave Brailsford experienced. When reminiscing about his childhood days, he laughed: "I would say to my dad: 'If I'm out with my mates and you're in Lycra, don't even think about waving at me.'"

Yet that has all changed beyond recognition. Even though Hoy holds six Olympic gold medals, today he finds there is no shortage of people willing to give him a run for his money. "Everyone wants to race me," said Hoy. "It happens all the time."

But Hoy is not one to rest on his laurels; in fact, he's been as disciplined as ever in the moves he's made since his Olympic departure from London 2012. He launched his own range of bikes, a clothing line, Hoy-Vulpine, and has proven pretty handy on the motor racing circuit, and has his eye on the legendary Le Mans 24-hour race as his next competitive target.

Both men have achieved so much between them, yet remain driven. Brailsford admitted, as he looks beyond this year's five-year anniversary of Team Sky, he rarely allows himself to sit back and enjoy the success. Instead, he always remains focused on the next improvements that can be made.

Undoubtedly, Hoy and Brailsford have been instrumental in the cycling culture we see today, with thriving mass-participation sportives and commuters switching to bikes all across the country — we're all reaping the benefits.

See our top tech picks from the London Bike Show on page 14.



Sir Chris Hoy was on top form and clearly enjoying life after racing



CA's Rebecca Charlton chats with Sir Dave Brailsford

Bikelock Holmes

What your bike says about you

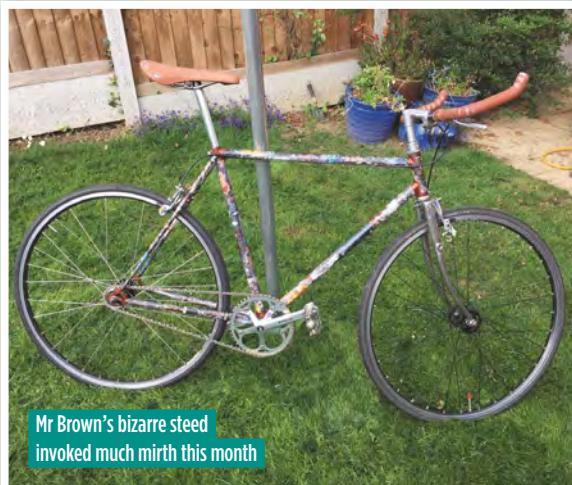


A pretty puzzle this month, popped into my lap from the firm hand of Mrs Hudson. I do relish Thursday mornings when she presents her French fancy on a silver platter while I fondle another exciting image.

This one puts me in mind of one of my earlier tales, 'A study in Bohemia'. Only a lank-haired, cheroot-smoking beatnik could concoct a bicycle of a loucheeness the like of which I have never seen before. Just one word stands out on the

accompanying note from a Mr Stephen Brown: 'decoupage'.

Truly this is the work of a diabolical fiend with a deranged fetish for paper, scissors, penny dreadfuls and sticky gum.



Mr Brown's bizarre steed invoked much mirth this month

Many fine works of art are embellished with decoupage involving inlays of the finest gilt and jewels. "Oh to experience the tooling skills of the true craftsman," is a cry oft heard from Watson during one of our case debriefs. He, for one, would ejaculate in horror at the limp talents of this bicycling decoupage doppelganger.

An amateur indeed, but one with a wicked sense of the outrageous, as can be ascertained by the erection of the handlebar stem to a quite

frankly suicidal limit. If provoking a reaction was the intention then, with reluctance, I concede the point. It appears that overzealous gripping of my briar pipe has rent it in two.

Thick-skinned? Send us a photo of your bike if you want the Bikelock treatment to... cyclingactive@ipcmedia.com



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£4.5m

Is being spent on two bridges in Guildford, with another planned for Cambridge, making cycling and walking safer and faster in both towns

May 1-3 The inaugural Cycle Touring Festival will be held on the banks of the Ribble at Waddow Hall in Clitheroe, Lancs, with camping available and a host of seminars and speakers lined up

Vision 0

That's zero tolerance of road deaths which, as transport policy in New York and Sweden, has slashed accident rates by promoting lower speed limits, freight curfews and safe routes for cycling

London Bike Show – best bits

Held over a weekend at the Excel centre in the East End of town, the London Bike Show picks up pace year on year. CA went for a look-see, and we've picked out a few highlights



Torch Helmets

It's not often you see a Dragons' Den product in the real world, but that's the case with the new Torch helmets. The lids feature 10 LED lights (five at the front and five at the rear), which are built neatly into the shell of the helmet. The £85 price-tag seems reasonable given the fact that you're effectively buying three pieces of kit. torchapparel.eu



Parlee WW2

Words failed us when we first laid eyes on Parlee's ESX-R custom-painted bike. Coloured up in the style of a Spitfire, Parlee knew a British

crowd would go mad for the design — indeed we had to wait quite some time before we could get a decent photo of it, such was the queue.

www.parleecycles.com

Superstar components

Some of the most eye-catching items in the whole show were on display at the Superstar stand. We particularly liked the colourful CNC-engineered out-front Garmin mounts. But what impressed us most was the price: just £12.99, around half what you could expect to pay for a similar product from a bigger brand. www.superstarcomponents.com



Caterham Bike

The world-renowned car company hasn't set out to create a high-performance superbike, but has instead focused on aesthetics. The top tube, down tube, seatstays and chainstays are all formed from a single piece of carbon-fibre and flow sweetly into each other. www.caterham-cycling.com



Enigma custom paintjob

Enigma has always offered custom frames handbuilt in its East Sussex workshop, but also set up Enigma Paint Works last year to create the custom paintjobs that had previously been outsourced. You can add a custom design to your new Enigma from £299, with resprays of other frames also available from £140. www.enigmabikes.com

Brooks/Levi's saddle

Brooks has teamed up with Levi's to create a denim-covered version of its Cambium C17 saddle. It's covered with recycled Levi's denim from the company's facilities in London, Los Angeles and Brooklyn, and is strictly limited edition, with only 1,000 being produced. www.brooksglendale.com



Hoy Vulpine

The combination of a top clothing brand and an Olympic legend meant we had high expectations for the Hoy Vulpine clothing range. And in the flesh we certainly weren't let down. All of the new items were easy on the eye and rather more casual than the kit that Sir Chris wore during the Olympics. www.vulpine.cc/hoy-vulpine



Boxer Utility bike

And finally... We don't think there was a bike (or trike) at the London Bike Show with a more obvious misnomer than the Boxer Rocket. Apparently inspired by Flash Gordon and the Hindenburg, the Rocket was intended as a one-off commission but attracted so much attention for the Dorset manufacturer that it decided to put it into production. www.boxercycles.com

WHY IS CYCLE INSURANCE ESSENTIAL FOR SPORTIVE RIDERS?

OFFICIAL SPONSOR



Insurance can be a minefield, and a lot of people often don't know what cover they've got. This only becomes clear once they need to make a claim, at which point the lack of cover can be costly.

Household insurance just doesn't cut it

Many cyclists do not have adequate insurance cover for the bikes they own or the riding they do. There is a common misconception that 'if my bikes get stolen, I'll claim on my household insurance'. In many cases, this simply isn't true.

Specialist cycle insurance offers the cover and peace of mind that household policies simply can't, and is the best bet when it comes to replacing your bikes and cycle kit in the unfortunate event of theft or an accident.

Recent research has shown that one in three household policies does not cover bikes away from the home. For those with building only insurance, bikes certainly won't be covered at all. Specialist cycle insurance covers you where household insurance won't – when you're riding.

Contents insurance policies can have bikes added, but this will incur an additional cost, which is often more than a cycle insurance policy.

Bikes are made and bought to be ridden, they're not ornaments to be displayed in a secure location that suits your contents insurance provider.

cycleplan's specialist cycle insurance policies mean that cyclists can get out and ride knowing they're covered at all times, including at home, work and most importantly out on the road when training and riding.

Theft and damage can happen, but there's no need to worry

It's a sad fact that many cyclists at some point will have their pride and joy stolen.

What's more when riding a sportive, accidents can happen: bad road surfaces, some inexperienced riders – if a crash happens it could leave your bike damaged and unusable.

This is where the peace of mind

offered by cycleplan's specialist cycle insurance really comes into its own: if your bike is stolen or damaged beyond repair, and up to three years old, **cycleplan** will replace it new for old to get you riding again in no time.

Imagine if on your last training ride your locked up bike goes missing from outside the café stop, just days before the sportive you've spent months preparing for. Well, this great feature of the policy alone offers holders the confidence to get out and ride, free from the fear that if their bike went missing they'd have to shell out for a new one themselves, at a cost well

above that of the insurance premium, or worse still miss the event and then still have to buy a new bike afterwards.

Add your accessories for full scale cover

In addition to the standard policy, cyclists can choose to add the accessories option. This recommended add-on extends the theft and damage cover to accessories such as helmet cams, locks and bike boxes.

What if you're liable in an accident?

Beyond your bike, **cycleplan's** specialist cycle insurance covers other scenarios and outcomes that can occur when cycling. The public liability cover of up to £5 million means that if damage were to occur to someone else's car or property as a result of your riding, or if you were in a collision with a pedestrian, any litigation would come out of your policy – rather than your own pocket.

When riding in a large group on a sportive a simple bumping of shoulders or a touch of wheels can be disastrous. But once covered, you won't have to worry about any resulting litigation or payouts, as these will be taken care of by your policy.

Get all this for as little as £16 per year

cycleplan is offering Cycling Active readers 20% off an annual policy. That's cover from as little as £16 for a full year. Visit [cycleplan.co.uk/cwse](http://www.cycleplan.co.uk/cwse) or call us on 0800 92 92 68 for instant cover today.



20-150km

The new shortest and longest routes for at least four of the six Macmillan Cyclette women-only sportives this year. Event one is the 43km Wiggle Dragon Ride on Sunday June 7



42mm

'Fatness' of tyres you can fit to new bike brand Rapide's prototype RL aluminium road bike, which comes with disc brakes and a carbon fork. Price with Shimano 105: £1,149. Available 2016 — we can't wait!

What's on the menu?

Each month we'll give you a recipe to try. Not only do they taste great but they'll help improve your cycling too

INGREDIENTS:

For soup:

- 4 red peppers, deseeded and cut into quarters
- 30g butter
- 1tbsp rapeseed oil
- 6 shallots, peeled
- 750mg pumpkin, peeled and diced into 2cm pieces
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves
- Leaves of one sprig of thyme
- 1.2 litre vegetable stock
- 100ml double cream
- Sea salt and black pepper

For candied shallots:

- 250mg unsalted butter
- ¼ tsp of cumin seeds
- 8 (250g) shallots, peeled and sliced
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ¼ tsp paprika
- 1 tsp honey



A tasty, filling soup, ideal as a post-ride meal

After a chilly ride, it's nice to come back to a bowl of something warm and preferably full of nutrients that will help rebuild and refuel your body.

Soup is a perfect post-ride meal. It is simple to make, you can add pretty much what you want to it, and it can be left in the fridge until you return from your ride, and be heated up in moments.

METHOD:

- 1 Preheat oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. Place pepper skin-side

up on baking sheet and roast for 25 minutes, until skins are charred. Remove and place in bowl. Cover in cling film and leave to cool. Once cool, peel skin and reserve flesh.

2 Meanwhile, melt the butter with the oil in a large saucepan. Add shallots, pumpkin and red chilli, season with salt and black pepper and sweat veg for five to 10 minutes without browning. Add garlic and thyme — cook on low heat for a further minute. Pour in vegetable stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Add in red peppers, cook for five minutes.

3 On medium heat, melt butter in a small pan. Add the cumin seeds and shallots, fry until soft. Add ground cumin and paprika and cook shallots for another minute — stir mixture to prevent burning. Fry until caramelised for 1-2 minutes. Remove from heat, season with salt and stir in honey.

4 Blend the soup in a processor or hand blender. Return to pan. If it's too thick, add more stock, and cream if you wish. Reheat soup and ladle into warm bowls. Place a spoonful of crème fraîche in each and sprinkle with chives, toasted pumpkin seeds and candied shallots.

Fallon McPhee



Fallon's loving two wheels again

Bone cancer meant a replacement knee for 15-year-old Fallon but it will take more than that to keep her from cycling

Cyclists Fighting Cancer is a unique charity that gives new bikes to children affected by cancer. Here we meet 18-year-old Fallon McPhee.

"I found out I had cancer in May 2012, when I was 15. I had osteosarcoma — a bone cancer — and now I've got a knee and bone replacement in my leg as the doctors had to cut out the cancer."

"Before I knew I had cancer I was finding it very hard to walk. I went to physiotherapy sessions at a local hospital for weeks but they didn't seem to be helping. Then I went to a chiropractor, who said to my mum that I really needed to be x-rayed — the doctors hadn't thought I needed an x-ray."

"Mum eventually got me x-rayed and soon after I was being taken out of school and rushed into hospital, having no idea what was going on. I had a load more scans and was told I had a tumour. I had no idea what it was or what it meant. I started having

chemotherapy in Southampton General Hospital — I spent nearly a year going in and out of Southampton General — and on September 10 2012, I had the operation on my leg.

"Once all treatment finished I needed physio, so I wanted to try cycling again. I got back on my old bike, and it was OK but I wasn't very stable. A friend of mine called Sam had a special bike fitted especially for his physical needs, so my mum sorted stuff out and I got an amazing trike from CFC. It was stable and safe for me but I didn't ride it much as no one ever went cycling with me, and I was worried people would make fun of me on a three-wheeler."

"Last year, though, I was given a two-wheeled bike that I love. With help from my boyfriend, who encourages me to cycle a lot and joins me on the odd occasion, I really enjoy it."

"Once I cycled from Chard to Poole and back. It took a whole day, but it was worth it to shock my mum, and I loved being able to feel normal again. I just want to thank CFC so much."



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SCULTURA range from £599.99 to £1,600 (model shown £1,600)

57% of Amsterdammers use bikes every day. There's such a problem finding spaces to park they are considering building a 7,000-space underwater bike park near the Central Station

£500,000

Will be invested in traffic-free cycling in Yorkshire, it was announced by Deputy PM Nick Clegg. Closed-roads circuits will encourage more people to take up cycling in a fun, safe environment

90 countries are covered in the CTC database of over 600 rides, from single routes up to multi-week tours, which members can access. Go to www.ctc.org.uk for more info

KAYE'S TOOLBOX TIPS



CA's resident mechanic Kaye Patton is able to fix pretty much anything

Light, safe, fast and done by hand. It's 85 years since Tullio Campagnolo patented a simple cam and lever mechanism which revolutionised wheel changes, and the QR skewer has not been bettered since.

Although they are easy to use and virtually failsafe, it is still worth checking how all the parts work, and the accepted ways to tighten and position the QR lever.



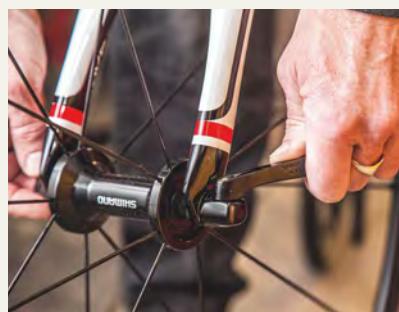
1. Four pieces make up the QR. The skewer is threaded at one end and attached to the other is a lever body and arm, which can move freely without turning the skewer. There's a dome-shaped nut on the other end and two cone-shaped springs (note orientation) to centre the QR in the hollow axle of the wheel hub body. A drop of oil into the lever body and wipe-down of the skewer will ensure smooth operation.



3. The fork should easily drop straight on to the exposed ends of the skewer. Don't do up the nut on the front, as it will need to be on the ends of the thread to clear the safety tabs on modern forks. Make sure the front wheel lever is always on the left-hand (non-drive) side of the bike.



2. To fit the QR remove the nut and its spring and feed the skewer through the hole in the axle body. When the threaded end appears, attach the nut by hand with a few turns. On the back wheel, make sure the nut is always on the drive side where the cassette is.



4. Front wheel: hold the lever in the open position behind the fork and horizontal to the ground. Turn the nut until it just binds, then close the lever using the palm of your hand while holding the spokes of the wheel. Push it fully home. A smooth firm feel is enough. No need to shove the lever or force it.



5. Rear wheel: nip up the nut the same as the front and tuck the lever in close to the stays. Close the lever fully home, just a little bit tighter than the front.

TIME TAKEN

5 MINUTES

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

- QR skewer
- Oil

Strava for Apple Watch

Strava is launching an app for the much-hyped Apple Watch, which promises to bring real-time ride data direct to your wrist.

Most of us will have been affected by the popularity of online community Strava. Modern rides invariably involve chasing KOMs or friends' segment records — the app has changed the way many of us enjoy cycling.

Equally revolutionary — if you believe the hype — is the new Apple Watch. It's not surprising then, that Strava has designed a special version of its mobile app specifically for the Apple Watch. Strava for Apple Watch will allow riders to track time, speed and distance in real time, and automatically sync activities with their Strava profiles.

The joy of Strava is that it allows you not only to track your own personal progress but also to race others, adding an element of competition to your riding. Here's what the creators have to say...

Erik Joule, Strava's chief marketing and commerce officer, said: "The redesigned app

will extend the breadth of Strava's product portfolio from web (strava.com) and mobile (iOS and Android apps) to the most anticipated wearable device of our time, Apple Watch."

Kyle Yugawa, design lead at Strava added: "Strava is committed to enhancing the experience for the athlete before, during and after each of his or her activities.

"Strava for Apple Watch fulfils a big part of this commitment by delivering an optimum 'live' experience that leverages Apple's beautiful design and Strava's interface," he continued.

So what does the app actually do? It allows you to track your performance on Apple Watch in real time, via your wrist, meaning you can leave your phone in your pocket when you ride. You'll also receive alerts as you approach a starred segment. You can check elapsed time in the moment, then get instant results at the finish. With Apple Watch's 'glances' feature, you can track your weekly training progress, while Strava's personalised training dashboard summarises your weekly training volume and progress toward goals.



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Check out [bookmyride.co.uk](#) for all the upcoming events in the *Cycling Weekly*, CA's sister magazine's, sportive series. With an Adventure Cross on April 12 and more road action coming up in May, there's something for everyone.

FROM THE ED



“Set yourself a big goal”

This month we bring you all the tips and advice you'll need for any events you've got coming up this year, in the *Cycling Active* sportive calendar and guide.

It seemed like a good time to sign up for some events ourselves; everyone in the CA editorial team has a big ride in their sights this season.

So many of us find ourselves sitting in the pub, or caught off-guard agreeing to the biggest rides of our lives, only to wake up the next morning thinking: ‘what have I done?’ Then comes the hard work and dedication to training, to get yourself not only to the start line but all the way to the finish, without too many aches and pains... or tears and tantrums.

When Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research asked if I would like to ride with them from London to Paris in September, I decided there was a sensible amount of time to prepare and so came back with an enthusiastic ‘yes’. I’m sure the months will fly by; before I know it, I’ll be lining up to set off for the four-day challenge. Slightly more urgent is our regular contributor Jocelyn Mack’s quest to get fit to ride the Etape du Tour this July – a big feat. The sheer amount of climbing she’ll be undertaking will test her limits.

I’m a firm believer that you need never be afraid of setting a big goal to stay focused in your cycling pursuits. As long as you have a realistic timeframe to get yourself ready and you are aware of the physical demands ahead, it’s a great motivator. You’ll get out of the front door regularly, even at the sight of drizzle or a howling wind.

Even if you have a short amount of time to prepare for your next sportive, there’s always something you can do to make your life easier on the day. Check out the information in this month’s supplement for our secrets to success.

You can follow Jocelyn’s progress on page 101 and find out more about Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research at beatingbloodcancers.org.uk/london-paris. Wish us luck!



Rebecca
Rebecca Charlton, deputy editor

Inbox

Write to us at

cyclingactive@timeinc.com

Headbanger

Picking up on the helmet discussion in recent issues of CA, I tend to use them at all times. My helmets have saved me from probable head injury on two recent occasions.

The first incident was whilst stationary at a roundabout waiting my turn. The car behind crept forward as he watched the traffic. If I had been in a car we would have nudged bumpers (or he might have been more aware of me), but by driving straight into my back wheel he knocked me over. My speed was nil and he was barely moving but my head still hit the road hard. The result? Superficial damage to the helmet and none at all to my head.

The second incident was more spectacular. I was ‘potholed’, by a long thin one, rather like a tramline. My front wheel snatched into it and the only way forward was off. I hit the deck on my left-hand side at 16mph. All the sticky-out bits of me had road rash. I broke my hip and collarbone – but my head survived with just a bit of concussion. The helmet did its job. Not a scratch on my head, glasses undamaged and one destroyed helmet.

As far as I can see, it’s not the big accidents that we need to worry about but the little moments on poor roads, ice patches and the like. From the head to the road surface is generally at least five feet. That’s a big drop with a hard landing.

Richard Venning, email

Seeing the light

I absolutely loved Julian Sayarer’s article on cycling and traffic (CA, April 2015). He put into writing many of my own thoughts. I certainly have the lights on my 4am, 15-mile commute through London categorised.

I know which are pedestrian activated, and where the traffic comes from on each set. I also know the speeds that vehicles can get up to on



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approach, having driven round them in my car. Because of this I know which lights I need to heed, and sometimes I even approach green lights with caution.

And I know which lights I can treat with cautious disdain. I am also aware of which lights have clearly been pressed by an unwitting pedestrian who, having realised it's 4am and there's no traffic, carry on their journey.

If I'm on an unfamiliar route, however, all lights are treated with equal respect. It is well known that some traffic light junctions lend themselves to traffic feeling a need to jump red lights, Bow roundabout being a prime example.

We all need to consider our actions, look up and pay attention to what's around us. It's the only way this city, and others like it, will continue to grow.

Simon Tuck, email

Come outside

I love being back on a bike. I'm losing weight and getting fitter (and poorer as I'm now on my third bike). It started with my old, heavy mountain bike then a new, lighter mtb before I finally treated myself to a cross bike.

Due to bad weather and the usual time restraints of work, I've not got as many miles in as I would have liked. So, as part of my new health kick, I joined a gym and decided to give their beginners' cycle class a go. But never again. Throughout the 25 minutes of pure sweat-drenched hell, the only thing that kept me going was pride.

So back to the fresh air, wind in the face and an enjoyable ride at my own pace it is.

John Dunlop, email

Look after each other

I generally cycle on a hybrid, but in a bout of mid-life crisis I bought myself a BMX, and headed for the tempting outdoor bike park. Full of false confidence, I set off and fell backwards while climbing a hill. It was a severe impact and my helmet cracked. I was generally uninjured.

I took the helmet to Edinburgh Cycles in Newcastle where I had got the helmet. I only took the helmet to ensure I got the same model. The shop got a new one within two days and deducted £8 for the old hat. Cyclists looking after cyclists!

Anthony Joisce, email



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Manners maketh man

In support of Simon Fletcher's letter (CA April 2015) let me give you another take on the elitism that seems to have infiltrated the cycling world.

We are a group of five guys ranging from 40 to 60-something who regularly pound the southern Scottish roads, enjoying each other's company and the banter that accompanies our rides. We make regular stops at various cafes and tea shops and then score them out of 10 just for a laugh.

We usually let the owners know that we will mark them down if we get a duff bacon roll or a shoddy slice of Victoria sponge. We happily acknowledge other riders with smiles on our faces and render assistance when required, something which over the years we have taken for granted. In the last few years, however, a new breed of cyclist seems to have crept in who consider us to be inferior mortals.

We can usually see them coming – head down, bedecked in the latest team colours and riding the latest carbon-fibre, super-light steeds (not to be biased, some of our group ride on carbon-fibre bikes, in team colours). Usually they thunder by with never even a glance, or at best a gritted-teeth grunt in response to our greeting. One of our group in frustration will normally shout back at them: "And that would be a hello then, would it?"

Never mind, I bet by the look on their faces we are having a lot more fun than they are and probably cycling at not too different a pace from them, in spite of their attitude. Just remember guys (or girls),

between us we are probably carrying half a dozen spare tubes, and one of these days you might just need one – and then that would be a hello, then, wouldn't it?

Angus Trail, email

Letter of the month wins a pair of Shimano R107 cycling shoes worth £99.99!



CYCLING ACTIVE

ISSUE 71

Cycling Active, Time Inc. (UK)
Leon House, 233 High Street,
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Cycling Active is published by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, Leon House, 233 High Street, Croydon CR9 1HZ. Colour origination: CTT Limited, Units C/D, Sutherland House, Sutherland Road, London E17 6BU. Printing: Southernprint (Web Offset) Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH16 5SN (Tel 01202 628300; fax 01202 632403).

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One year subscription rates
(13 issues, priority mail) UK £61.75; Europe €82.10; USA \$105.50;
Rest of North America \$105.50; Rest of the World: £71.45

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Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to Cycling Active, Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA

Subscription records are maintained at Time Inc., Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU. England. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Back issues: John Denton Services, PO Box 772, Peterborough PE2 6JW
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ABC Jan-Dec 2014 (Print and digital) 20,972



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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Canyon's cheapest carbon-fibre road bike is unbelievably good value

BEST FOR

All-round riding from Sunday sportives to mountain epics

TESTED THIS MONTH

Miles and miles of riding through the tail end of winter into a beautifully warm early spring



Canyon Endurace CF 7.0 £1,099

Bargain carbon road bike from German giant Canyon

Chris Catchpole

There isn't a lot that German brand Canyon gets wrong. As a manufacturer, its bikes are well regarded by both the cycling press and consumers worldwide, with a reputation for being well-built, looking good and riding well. It gets better too; its direct to consumer business model means that it can offer its bikes for great prices. After years of pushing the limits of acceptable profit margins, Canyon isn't resting on its laurels. What we have here is Canyon's cheapest carbon-fibre road bike, the Endurace CF 7.0. At only £1,099, with great components and finishing kit, it's a jaw-dropping bargain.

Frameset

Last summer, *Cycling Active* attended the launch of this bike and discovered that this isn't just an off the shelf carbon frame, built to fit in to a competitive price point for consumers. Not at all. Canyon spent a long time developing the Endurace frameset to be both fast and comfortable (hence the name) from the get-go. The asymmetric seat tube, combined with a 100 per cent carbon fork and special thin VCLS seatstays make for a progressive frameset that's not just here to make up the numbers – it's here to make a difference.

Components

The 105 was always Shimano's best all-round groupset, and then they had the cheek to go and make it even better by improving the ergonomics, the shifting, and adding in another gear, bringing the total on the cassette up to a spinal-tapping 11. At this price point, we're used to seeing corners not just being cut, but having them completely ignored, with cheap brakes or budget chainsets. That's not the case here. Canyon has gone all out with a full Shimano 105 groupset. That means the braking will match up to the shifting, and the whole aesthetic appeal of the bike takes a positive step away from much of the competition, with matching collars and cuffs.

Wheels

We're not about to berate Canyon for sticking a cheap set of wheels on the £1,099 Endurace considering the quality exhibited elsewhere. Mavic's Aksium One wheelset works well, is dependable

"It's agile and friendly, and encourages a brisk pace, but at the same time it's very forgiving"

Specification

Frameset Canyon Endurace carbon
Gears Shimano 105
Chainset Shimano 105
Brakes Shimano 105
Wheels Mavic Aksium One (pictured above with DT Swiss R24s)
Tyres Continental GP4000S II
Bars Canyon H28
Stem Canyon V13
Saddle Fizik Ardea VS
Seatpost Canyon S23 VCLS
Weight 7.65kg (M)
Size range XS-3XL
Size tested M
Contact www.canyon.com

and, well, they're Mavics, and that's got to be worth something. Considering the price point, the wheelset is the only thing we're not amazed by, so it's by no means a derogatory comment. But it's our job to find flaws in a bike, and saying that the wheelset doesn't quite match up to the rest of the bike is the most tactful way of doing it.

Riding

After adding up everything we've seen so far, it comes as no surprise to find that riding the Endurace CF 7.0 is nothing short of a pleasure. That frameset and fork, which weighs only a shade over 1kg, is a real treat to ride. It's agile and friendly, and encourages a brisk pace, but at the same time it's



Fizik Ardea saddle features ergonomic channel



ADVANCE

Tarmac & Trail

A

Based on a classic road bike layout, an Advance series Ridgeback is simply a more rugged version of the concept brought up to date with added practicality for everyday use.

Constructed to a geometry designed for comfortable power output and confident handling a Ridgeback Advance has generous tyre clearance as well as being specified with mudguard and rack fittings. In keeping with recent trends in road bike design, both models are fitted with a compact shallow drop handlebar. A versatile alternative to straight bars, they offer a variety of positions to enhance longer distance comfort. A Shimano triple chainset transmission, robust wheelset and Continental tyres complete the package.

ADVANCE 7 £899.99

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S SPORTLINE



very forgiving. The ride is responsive too, but a more exciting set of wheels would really open up the potential locked in that stealthy black frame. We mentioned that Canyon hasn't cut any corners, and nowhere is this more obvious than with the choice of tyres. Continental GP4000S IIs are generally considered to be one of the best road tyres on the market, and the fact that Canyon has supplied them here, on the cheapest bike in the range, amounts to a ridiculous level of over-specing.

Conclusion

Yes, this is a brilliant bike and not just 'for the price'. Never until now has a bike at this price point offered so much, and we'd be confident in riding it in the company of much higher-priced peers. It's very hard to pick out any major flaws in the whole package, too. It's even got lightness on its side, tipping the scales at only 7.65kg all-in. The budget wheelset shouldn't put off any serious interest in the 7.0 model, but if it does, an 8.0 model, with an upgraded wheelset and seatpost, is available for £1,299.

End

VERDICT

One of the best carbon-fibre road bikes available this close to a grand

Spot on...

- Comfortable and sprightly frameset
- Full Shimano 105 groupset
- An amazing price

Could do better

- The wheelset doesn't reveal everything the frameset has to offer

SPECIFICATION LEVEL

20/20

BUILD QUALITY

19/20

ROAD HANDLING

19/20

RIDE COMFORT

19/20

VALUE FOR MONEY

20/20

OVERALL RATING

97
/100

ALTERNATIVES

Trek Domane 2.3 £1,100

If you're after a bike you can ride away from a local bike shop, the Domane might be one to consider. It's the same price as the Canyon we're testing, but the price is the only thing to match the Canyon on paper, as the 105 groupset isn't specced throughout the bike, and the frame is aluminium rather than carbon.

www.trekbikes.com



Dolan L'Etape from £1,049.99

British brand Dolan can compete with the Canyon in both price and spec. Its carbon-fibre L'Etape model costs around the same (down from £1,112.99) and comes complete with a full Shimano 105 11-speed groupset too. The finishing kit is all nicely branded, and like the Canyon, there are plenty of other spec options available.

www.dolan-bikes.com



CA EXPLAINER

Acros headset

One of the Endurace's more quirky features is the Acros headset. Acros is a German manufacturer of bike components, and Canyon has fitted its unique headsets on a lot of its models. It works slightly differently to a normal headset, by securing the fork to the head tube just below the stem. It does away with the standard top-cap and bung solution, which the Germans have decided is obviously well overdue an upgrade, and the top cap supplied is only for show.





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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Characterful road bike with chromoly steel frame

BEST FOR

All-seasons road rides

TESTED THIS MONTH

On carpet-bombed lanes running with water



Genesis Equilibrium 10 £999.99

Heavy metal or prog rock, it's hard to tell with Genesis

Luke Edwardes-Evans

Pitched into the most competitive price band, the Genesis Equilibrium 10 is the entry-level model of a range that consists of eight machines with seven steel frames and one made from titanium. Four are available with disc brakes. The 10 has a chromoly frame with caliper brakes, Shimano Tiagra 10-speed gears and wide Alex rims with super-fat 28c Continental tyres.

Frameset

Taiwanese chromoly steel tubes are used for the Equilibrium 10 frame. Double-butted for extra strength at each end they are TIG-welded in a conventional diamond frame with a sloping top tube.

Satin blue paint with black panels and yellow bands are easy on the eye



Blue and yellow paintjob is pleasingly retro

and there's not an aerofoil section in sight. Cables are routed neatly outside the tubes just like they used to be and the head tube is not shaped like a pear. Traditionalists will approve.

Double bottle cage, mudguard and rear rack mountings qualify the frame for all-seasons riding. There's even clearance for 28c tyres, too. Stripped down or fully loaded, the Equilibrium 10 is configured to be a versatile all-rounder.

Hidden under the paint is a carbon fork with alloy steerer. That keeps the weight down a bit but on the 56cm model without pedals the complete bike still weighs just over 10kg (22.2lb) — around a kilogram more than bikes with full carbon frames at this price point.

Components

Shimano's 10-speed Tiagra drivetrain propels the Equilibrium 10 and you can't fault the comfort of the levers or the efficiency of the gear change. An FSA Omega MegaExo compact chainset runs on an FSA BB400 bottom bracket.

The FSA logo wore off after one ride in overshoes — why they don't use laser

"The wheels and tyres are just the right mix of traditional and modern"

Specification

Frameset: Genesis

Mjölnir double-butted chromoly tubes with carbon fork and alloy steerer

Gears: Shimano

Tiagra 10-speed, 12-30t cassette
Chainset: FSA Omega MegaExo compact 50/34t

Brakes: Shimano BR451, 57mm long-drop

Wheels: 32h Alex

AT470 rims on Shimano Tiagra hubs with Sapim butted spokes

Tyres: Continental Grand Sport Race 700x28c

Bars/stem:
Genesis Road Compact/Genesis Road

Saddle: Genesis Road
Seatpost: Genesis alloy 27.2mm

Size range:
50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm

Weight: 10.1kg / 22.2lb

56cm model

Size tested: 56cm

Contact: www.genesisbikes.co.uk

etching or stickier paint is a mystery. We are not too keen on the stamped alloy inner ring, either.

Genesis-branded components complete most of the finishing kit from the bars to the seatpost and saddle. All work fine, especially the short drop compact bars that make riding on the drops so much easier.

Shimano long-drop (see boxout) caliper brakes are as conventional as they come, and with moulded brake blocks it's a set-up which is starting to look dated these days.

Wheels

One or two compromises elsewhere on the spec sheet are made up for in the wheels and tyres. Continental's Grand Sport Race tyres take the trend for oversize tyres to another level and these 28c fatties are the first thing you notice about the Equilibrium 10. Seated on wide-rim 32-hole Alex rims with Sapim butted spokes, brass nipples and big barrel Tiagra hubs, the wheels and tyres are just the right mix of traditional and modern. A handsome pair of hoops and those tyres look fabulous.

Riding

If fat tyres give you a feeling of confidence then you'll love the view from the driving seat of the Equilibrium 10. Filled with 80psi they feel just as fast as 23c on the roll and are considerably



LITTLE
THINGS
MATTER

7 KH VP DQGHMDLOV P DNH
WKH EIJ J HWNGDIIHUHQFH
2 XUQ KQZHJU KWXTXDOV FKLOQHJV
EINHV P DNH UGLQJ HDVHU VDIHU
DQG P RUH LQVSLWQJ
ZZZ LVQEINHV FR XN





more comfortable. Banked over, Conti Grand Sports soak up bumps and are less prone to 'tramlining' in cracks.

In wet and dry it feels like you can brake harder and with more confidence – unfortunately this only serves to highlight the basic Shimano side-pull brakes that lack feel and power. Direct-mount calipers attached to twin bosses on the forks and stays would do justice to the wheels and add a modern feature to the frame, too.

With a relaxed head angle of 72° and 1,010mm wheelbase on the 56cm model, the Equilibrium is slow steering in the bends but very stable in a straight line. If you like the feeling of the front wheel darting left and right when out of the saddle the front end will disappoint. Fitting wider bars may help remedy the situation as the extra leverage can help overcome the inertia of a slow-steering bike.

Overall ride comfort is very good which is what you would expect from a steel frame and those balloon tyres. As an all-day bike the Equilibrium would be a relaxing and confidence inspiring companion. Only the weight lets it down. On a hilly route that extra kilogram would start to drag.

Conclusion

Bikes with steel frames appeal to a small but fervent and – some would say – discerning, band of riders. To them things like ride quality, craftsmanship, longevity, style and tradition count for more than outright performance. But for the same price as the Equilibrium 10 you could have a full carbon rig weighing at least a kilo less and with a similar spec.

Turn up at any sportive or club run and the proliferation of carbon speaks for itself. Most cyclists would rather keep up and not stand out from the crowd than get dropped in style. If you want carbon matching performance from a steel frame you have to pay a lot more and while the Equilibrium 10 appeals on some levels, it's just not quite exclusive enough.

End



VERDICT

Comfortable and stable but lacks charisma

Spot on...

- All-seasons steel frame
- Quality wheels and 28c tyres
- Shimano Tiagra gears

Could do better

- Budget chainset
- Basic Shimano brakes
- Only one colour

SPECIFICATION LEVEL

17/20

BUILD QUALITY

19/20

ROAD HANDLING

17/20

RIDE COMFORT

19/20

VALUE FOR MONEY

17/20

OVERALL RATING

89 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Genesis Equilibrium 20 £1,299.99

Just one up from the '10', the Equilibrium 20 has an iconic Reynolds 725 chromoly frame and is equipped with legendary Italian component brand Campagnolo gears and chainset. Wheels are the same as the '10' with 28c tyres and the only bum notes are the Tektro caliper brakes. At under 10kg the '20' will climb better and the Phantom Black will impress your carbon-riding mates.



Eastway ST1.0 £899.99

Featuring a Reynolds 520 steel frame kitted with SRAM Apex gears and sturdy E28 wheels, the Eastway offers a very similar riding experience to the Equilibrium 10. SRAM's Apex gears can operate with a 32t sprocket on the cassette, two more than the '10' and with a compact chainset that will appeal to lovers (and haters) of steep climbs. Tyres are even fatter too, Kenda 32c, and the 1.0 also comes with full-length mudguards.



CA EXPLAINER

Long-drop brakes

This applies to traditional side-pull caliper brakes. Long-drop brakes have extended calipers that reach down further than short-drop, allowing much fatter tyres to be fitted.

If you want to fit bigger tyres it's worth checking the clearances between the underside of the brake and the tip of the tyre. Short-drop brakes on a race bike not designed for mudguards might have only a few millimetres of clearance.

A frame designed for long-drop brakes will have more generous clearances and should take at least a 28c tyre like the Genesis. You can, of course, fit skinnier tyres without affecting the brakes at all.



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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Because it's a great showcase of British engineering

BEST FOR

Long rides, Audaxes, sportives

TESTED THIS MONTH

On the Kent and Surrey back lanes



Enigma Etape Disc from £2,399

Enigma's 'bike for life' combines classic good looks with the latest technology

Jim Clarkson

Enigma is perhaps best known for its high-end, handcrafted titanium framesets and custom builds. Based in Hailsham, East Sussex, it's a brand firmly planted in building bikes with classic looks that feature modern technology. Each of its bespoke bikes is built in-house and finished in Enigma's purpose-built paintshop.

Enigma offers road bikes in various guises and the most recent of these is

the new Etape Disc range. Built in the Far East, it offers the Enigma brand at a more affordable price, bringing the Sussex firm into the mainstream.

Frameset

New for 2015, the Etape Disc range offers all the versatility of the original but with the stopping power of hydraulic or mechanical disc brakes. The 9 3AL-2.5V double-butted titanium frame has a new heavier gauge chainstay,

Specification

Frameset: 9 3AL-2.5V double-butted titanium

Gears: Campagnolo

Athena 11-speed

Brakes:

Hope hydraulic disc

Wheels: H Plus Son

Archetype rims with

White Industries hub

Tyres: Conti Ultra

GatorSkin 25c

Handlebar: Enigma

Stem: Enigma

Saddle: Brooks

(pictured) or Enigma

Seatpost: Enigma

Sizes: 52, 54, 56, 57, 59

& 60cm

Size tested: 54

Contact:

enigmabikes.com

coupled with a cleverly designed CNC-machined rear dropout with an internal disc.

It's claimed the dropout design ensures that all the additional braking stresses, imposed on the frame by the disc brake calipers, are absorbed through the dropouts and not the frame stays, which could otherwise potentially fatigue over time with the extra braking loads generated.

The 1-1/8th head tube and biaxial down tube adds to the solid but graceful looks. The frame also has more than adequate options for mudguards and panniers, to give a versatile and capable bike that would be happy on Audaxes, commutes, sportives and just plain old bike rides.

Components

The Etape disc is available in three Shimano-equipped builds: 1.1 Tiagra, 1.2 105 and 1.3 Ultegra, the version we rode. It can also be built to other specs, such as the Campagnolo Athena-equipped, Hope disc-brake build we have pictured here. All models feature the same trusty Continental Tyres and high-quality Enigma finishing kit.

The headline feature is of course the disc brakes. The Ultegra discs look smaller than comparable SRAM units and offer powerful and smooth braking that doesn't fade, even in bad weather. If the Hope brakes are used then a neat □



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Shimano Ultegra 6800
Shimano Ultegra 6800 50-34 Compact
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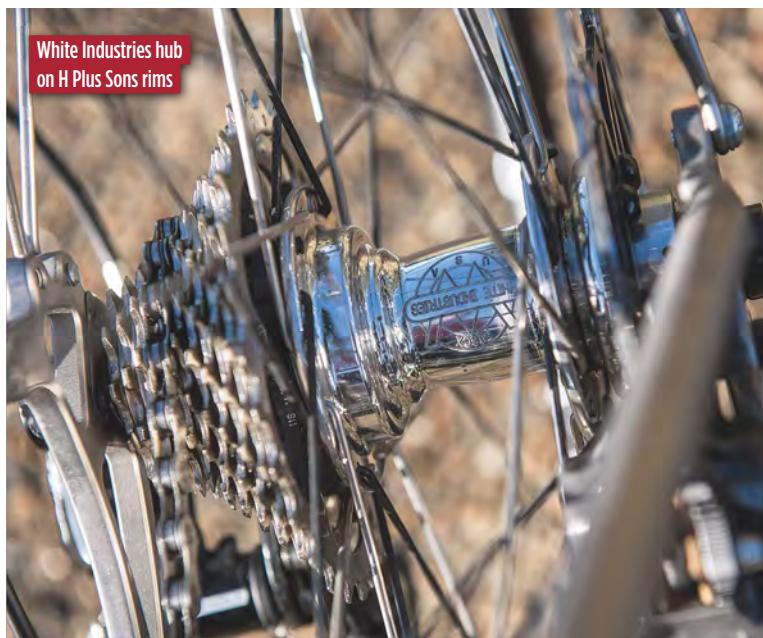
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cable-to-hydraulic changer unit sits under the stem, retaining the clean lines of the frame.

Wheels

Our version came with Mavic Ksyrium Pro Disc wheels, which were excellent. They're light and still positive when under load. Durable and well-built, they feel stiff, but not overly harsh. Coupled with the reliable Continental Ultra GatorSkins, this is a great set of disc hoops that can cope with the rough and tumble of all-round winter use.

Riding

Taking the bike out onto familiar lanes and roads opened up the confidence to let rip through the corners. Whether carrying high entry speeds or gently scrubbing off a few mph, thanks to the feel and finesse from the brakes, the handling felt sharp and exact.

Climbing was engaging and spritely out of the saddle and when seated, and spinning the bike felt rewarding to every pedal stroke. The bike feels light and fast in a way that belies its relatively modest specification.

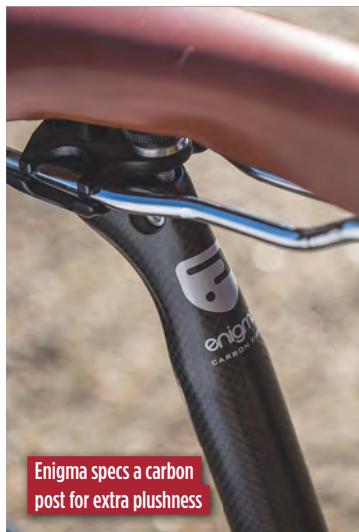
Titanium offers a degree of comfort as a material, but crucially it's the geometry and componentry, combined with that precious metal, that all add to the Etape Disc's ride quality.

Conclusion

Enigma has got the Etape Disc spot-on – it's light and reliable and, at the lower end of its range, offers a relatively affordable wonder-bike. The durability in terms of use and application are what makes the Etape Disc so special. It wouldn't be out of its depth racing, but that's not really where its heart lies.

Longer rides are where this bike really excels, combining comfort and speed with a balanced, assured feel to the ride. It's a bike that will let you knock through many Audaxes and sportives and duly last the course – both literally and metaphorically.

End



VERDICT

An excellent frame and build that offers a comfortable ride and decent handling

Spot on...

- Performance of titanium frame and carbon fork matches their looks
- Disc brakes offer reliability and inspire confidence
- Componentry and build quality

Could do better...

- Not much to mention here!

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	19/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	19/20
OVERALL RATING	92/100

ALTERNATIVES

Genesis Equilibrium Disc Ti £2,849.99

With the racing influences of the Genesis team, this is another great example of a versatile road frame with disc brakes and titanium tubing, to add further durability. Good component and wheelsets complete the package.

www.genesisbikes.co.uk



Lynskey Sportive Disc Ti from £2,499.99

Featuring a slightly more 'value' package — cable brakes as opposed to hydraulic, and a Deore XT wheelset — this is a good alternative for a titanium road frame, with the features for touring and commuting duties built in.

www.fatbirds.co.uk



CA EXPLAINER

Disc brakes

Removing the braking surface from the structure of the wheel reduces the rotating mass at the extremity of the wheel's radius. This, coupled with more powerful and consistent brake performance, are the main advantages of disc brakes. In addition, the capabilities of a bike and the confidence of the rider often lie in how well the bike can be controlled. While there is still a slight weight penalty, overall it's a small price to pay.



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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Dahon introduces a budget commuter to the market with a super-speedy folding motion

BEST FOR

Commuting!

TESTED THIS MONTH

Through the heaving metropolis that is, erm, Guildford



Dahon Jifo £609

Affordable folder

Steve Shrubsall

Folding bicycles not only have pots of potential when it comes to cutting on commuting costs, they also afford the discerning cyclist an opportunity to stay a-wheel during the busy working week. It's hardly a revelation, then, that the current market is awash with collapsible product destined for seemingly impenetrable urban chasms. From taxis to tubes — these little gems have got the big city sewn up.

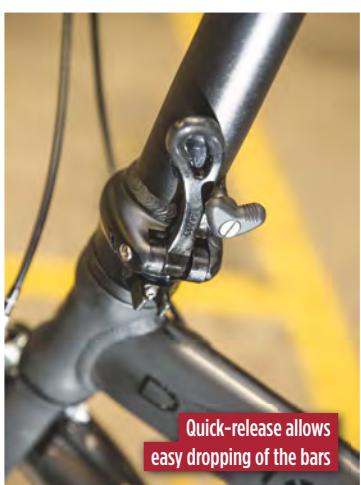
Residing towards the budget end of

the spectrum, the Dahon Jifo looks to be a viable step towards a revamped route to and from work.

Frameset

The frame, as with most folders, tends to define the entire bike. Comprising Dahon's patented Dalloy aluminium and Jifold vertical hinge technology, it has two primary pivot points, one towards the centre of the top tube, and the second at the base of the handle post. Each of these are released and tightened with equal ease, and one is almost instantaneously rewarded with a nifty little commuter or the collapsed version thereof. Ease of use is surely the Dahon's standout feature. The Jifo, according to marketing blurb, is said to take just seven seconds to fold and unfold, and despite this tester having the manual dexterity of a mollusc, I can indeed confirm this to be true. In fact, I daresay that after a cheeky espresso or two, the five-second mark could well be beaten. It's an incredible feat of engineering.

The frame is finished with a simple matt black coating, and the glossy black



“Almost instantaneously it folds or unfolds — ease of use is the standout feature”

Specification

Frameset: Dalloy aluminium with Jifold vertical hinge technology

Gears: Dahon custom 9t

Brakes: Front: forged road alloy caliper; rear: alloy forged mini-V-brake

Chainset: Dahon 39t

Wheels: 16in Lightweight doublewall with CNC

Handlebar: Dahon urban 500mm wide with six-degree sweep

Stem: Fusion, zero stack

Saddle: Dahon ergo comfort

Seatpost: Dahon 6061 aluminium 30 x 350mm

Weight: 9.1kg

Contact:
www.dahon.co.uk

decals add some character. Indeed darker shades monopolise the entirety of this bike; with coverage on the cranks, seatpin, and all the way down to the very last spoke, Dahon has created a very tasteful package.

Components

The Jifo has no gears; it runs a single-speed drivetrain using in-house parts. Although this serves to keep the weight down to just 9.1kg, and is perhaps key to the fluid folding motion, it might also be considered a touch limiting. Having that extra sprocket or two can be the difference between a thigh-igniting ascent and a leisurely climb up to the train station. However, as expected, the provided gear (39x9) is accommodating enough to confront moderate ramps, but with enough length to reach satisfactory speeds on the flat.

The brakes are a mixed bag. Avid levers — in a rare branded-component appearance — are hooked up to alloy calipers at the front and mini-Vs at the rear; a combination resulting from the low price point.

Dahon has played a blinder with the saddle, though. It's an in-house item, fashioning a highly commodious perch without compromising style. Not, of course, that style is part of the modus operandi here, but we aren't averse to ticking the street-cred box.

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**Wheels**

The 16-inch wheel size is pretty much standard folding-bicycle fare. It is true that after riding road or mountain bikes it will take some time to adapt to these dinky little hoops, but after getting properly acquainted you'll find they roll well enough. Dahon has spec'd the Jifo with lightweight double-wall rims fitted with Primo rubber. Again, all very ordinary, but predictable for the price.

Riding

A folding bike's raison d'être is functionality, so some tough questions must be asked. How did it handle on the blacktop? Any portability issues between station platforms? How did it behave once in situ on the train? Did it elicit ferocious snarls from irritated comrade commuters?

On the road, provided it was relatively flat — which on my commute it is — the Jifo fared just fine, putting paid to a mile or two of tarmac with nary a complaint. Condensed into collapsed mode, its lightweight 9kg saw it comfortably carried through passenger-heavy areas, and once on the train it sat humbly in the shadow of airport-bound suitcases in the luggage hold. Travelling on public transport with the Jifo, it transpired, was a totally painless experience, which, when bookended with moderate physical exertion, set one up nicely for the day.

Conclusion

For a first foray into the world of urban commutes and folding bicycles at the economy end of the market, a more suitable companion than the Jifo there is not. Aside from the attractive price tag, it is deliciously easy to fold and unfold and cuts the mustard on the road, too.

End

**VERDICT**

Ideal for those wanting more from the daily commute

Spot on...

- Great value commuter
- Outstanding folding speed

Could do better

- Brakes could do with an upgrade

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	19/20
ROAD HANDLING	17/20
RIDE COMFORT	17/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	19/20
OVERALL RATING	89/100

ALTERNATIVES**Brompton H6L £1,080**

At the business end of the folding bike spectrum, just shy of a grand, is the Brompton H6L. A six-speed hub comes as standard, allowing undulating routes to be taken on with comparative ease. The H-type handlebars are conducive to keeping a good posture while riding, and at the same time giving the rider an air of elegance.

**Tern Link C7 £299**

At under £300, you're getting a whole lotta bike for your buck with the Tern Link. Weighing in a touch heavier than most Dahons or Bromptons as a result of its size, the Tern boasts a seven-speed Shimano gearset and robust aluminium frame.

**CA EXPLAINER****16-inch wheels**

Commuters spec'd with 16-inch wheels are easily the most compact and manoeuvrable on the folding bike market. They do, however, compromise speed and riding comfort by way of increased rolling resistance. Therefore, decide if a folder with larger wheels might better suit your ride to work — but don't overlook the weight and storage elements.



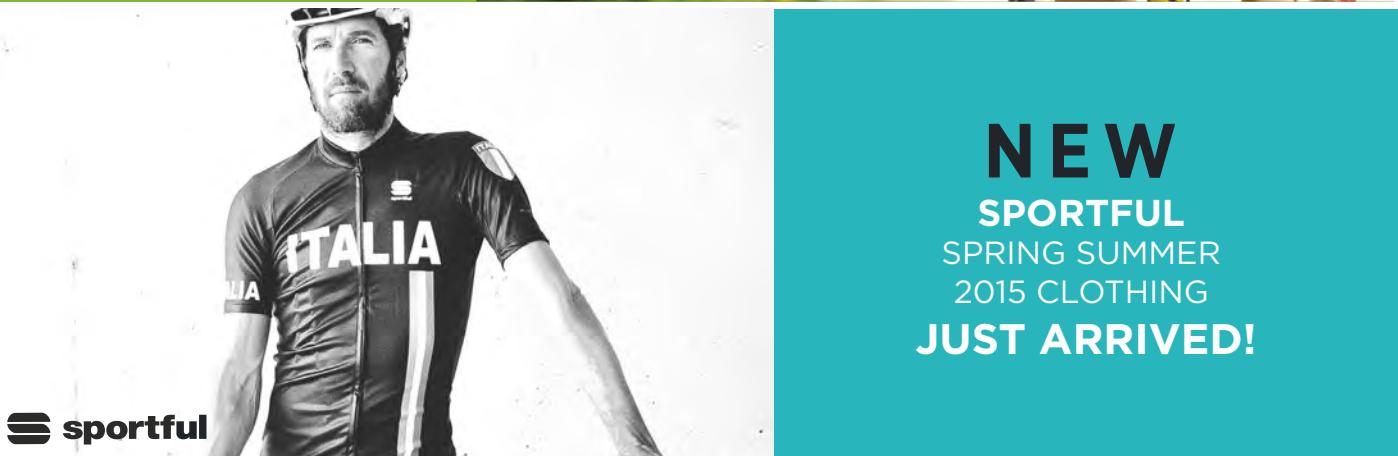
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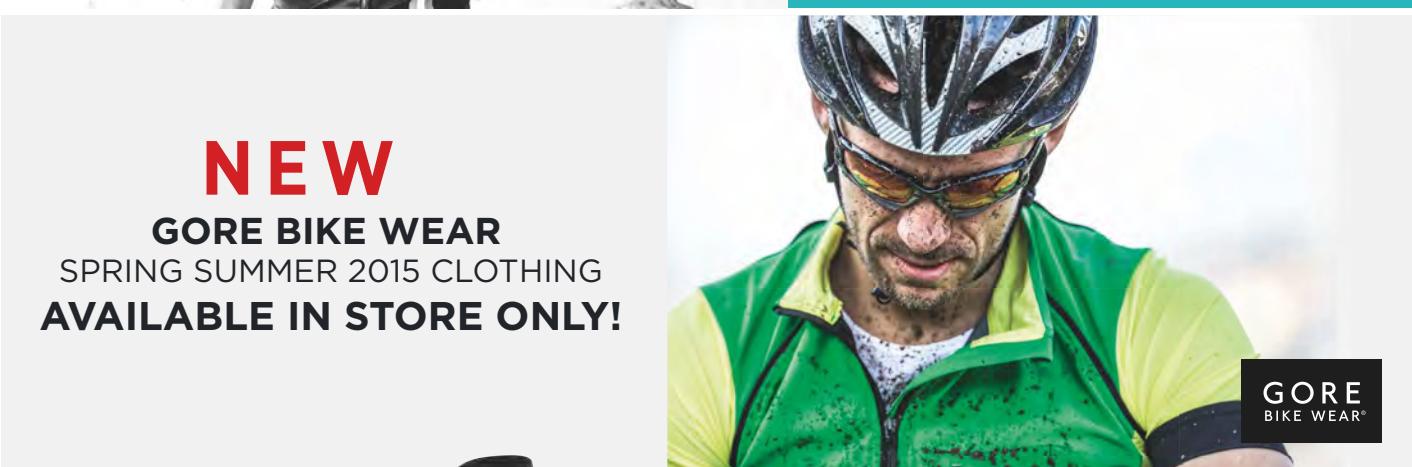
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7 OF THE BEST

Helmets under £70

An abundance of safe, stylish and comfortable helmets can be found for less than £70. *Henry Robertshaw* reviews seven of the best

Words Henry Robertshaw

Few things divide the cycling community quite like helmets. We're going to steer well clear of that little debate here, but if there's one thing everyone can agree on, it's that there is a dizzying array of products for what you might expect to be a pretty simple piece of kit.

The £50-£70 price point is the most densely populated part of the market, and should be

considered the price range you should be looking at for a mid-level lid that will offer a good level of performance and likely a sleeker, more 'pro' look than the budget options.

For this sort of money you're not going to be looking for a specialist helmet such as an aero or super-lightweight lid that focuses on one area of performance at the exclusion of all

else. Instead we'll be on the lookout for a good all-rounder — a helmet that can keep us cool in hot weather, doesn't weigh an absolute ton, and, perhaps most importantly, is comfortable to wear.

After all, the best thing you can say about a helmet is that you didn't realise you were wearing it.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Adjustability

With most manufacturers only offering their helmets in two or three sizes, adjustability is key to ensuring both comfort and safety. Less expensive lids often achieve this by way of a ratchet system at the rear of the helmet. A better alternative, however, is some form of dial. This will offer greater adjustability and be easier to use while riding.



Ventilation

Keeping your head warm in winter, either with a skullcap or cotton cap, is relatively easy compared to keeping it cool in summer. More vents doesn't always mean better ventilation. The key to a good design is the ability to let in plenty of cool air at the front of the helmet, funnel it over the scalp and allow the warm air to escape out of the back.



Protection

It may seem obvious, but at the end of the day the main function of a bike helmet is to offer protection. All of the helmets in this test comply with CE EN1078, the European safety standard for bicycle helmets. Any lid that doesn't hit this mark should be avoided.

Bell Event £49.99

The least expensive helmet in this test certainly doesn't look it at first glance. The aesthetics and matt finish add a touch of class to this lid, which is available in six different colours. Like the other helmets on test, the Bell features removable padding and a comfortable fit — however, the retention system is less effective. We found it can

loosen slightly while riding and isn't in the same league as the Giro Roc Loc system. But, at £20 cheaper than the Savant we can't complain.

A great-looking helmet and definitely an option if you're on a budget

www.zyro.co.uk

7



Giro Savant £69.99

The Savant closely resembles many higher end models in the Giro range but at less than half the price. Features include 25 vents and removable Velcro padding, which is useful for washing. Being available in six different colours means it is possible to match the helmet to your current kit. Giro's Roc Loc 5 retention system, found on higher spec

models, is an excellent example of how top-end tech trickles down into more affordable models and offers superb fit and adjustment.

8

A comfortable, good-looking lid, with impressive trickle down features

www.zyro.co.uk



Uvex Boss Race £59.99

The Uvex Boss Race is one of the most adjustable helmets we've tested in any price bracket. As well as the dial adjustment system at the rear, the retention casing can also be moved up and down, while the chinstrap is adjusted by a button with six different positions, making it easy to change on the move. This makes for a helmet that should

be comfortable whatever your head shape. Ventilation is also pretty good, with a fly-catching mesh covering the front vents.

A good all-round helmet with outstanding adjustability

www.raleigh.co.uk

9



Lazer Blade £59.99

This helmet closely resembles the top-end Lazer Z1 model and is a hugely impressive lid with lots of great features. The first thing to note is that the retention system adjustment is on top of the helmet, not the rear, making this lid, in the words of Lazer, "ponytail friendly". The retention system works well and the fit is very

comfortable. Our only gripe is the limited colour choices currently available — essentially variations on black or white.

Great retention system and looks, an excellent unisex option

www.madison.co.uk



Mavic Espoir £65

This Mavic helmet features an optional, removable visor, making it suitable for on and off-road use. As such, it's a great option for those who want a do-it-all helmet for all disciplines without breaking the bank. We found the internal shape of this helmet to be rounder than the others on this test. This isn't necessarily

a negative point but you'd be well advised to try before you buy as it won't suit a wide range of head shapes.

Attractive styling make this is a great option — if it fits

www.mavic.co.uk

7

**Scott Arx £54.99**

In our opinion one of the best-looking helmets on test, the Scott Arx fits close to the head, and can also offer performance to match its good looks, with internal cooling channels making this lid a good option for warmer days.

Like the Giro, the Scott features an adjustment system that has trickled down from more expensive models,

ensuring a close fit around the rear of your head. The main strap is more standard fare, but is still nice and comfortable.

Great looks and ventilation with decent adjustability to boot

www.scott-sports.com

8

**Alpina Cybric £69.99**

Unsurprisingly given that they are part of the same company, this Alpina lid offers similar adjustability to the Uvex, with a dial system at the rear and chin straps adjusted via a button. The rear of the casing can also be rotated up and down to ensure a comfortable fit, but we found that this was liable to slip down when riding.

Ventilation was good, but we weren't convinced by the styling of the Alpina — it doesn't defy the mid-range price point in the same way as a few of the other helmets.

Fairly good adjustment system, let down by budget looks

www.todayscyclist.co.uk

7

**VERDICT**

The main thing we'll be taking from this group test is that you don't have to splash the cash to get your hands on a good-looking and comfortable helmet.

All of these helmets are worthy of consideration, but it is the Lazer Blade that takes it on the line. Placing the retention system on the top of the helmet makes it easier to use, especially on the move, and means it's a comfortable choice with good ventilation and an excellent fit whatever your hairstyle. The Uvex Boss Race is a very close second, also offering great adjustability in a number of areas to make for another great-fitting lid.





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Carbon sportive bikes

Endurance machines from the big brands

Words Simon Smythe

Faster, lighter, stiffer, more aerodynamic... designing bikes for professional cyclists is the easy bit. Now what about creating a bike that will allow an average person who works full time and only rides at the weekend to complete a mountainous 100-mile event inside the time limit, leaving them fresh enough to go back to work the next morning? That's much more difficult.

With the sportive scene expanding inexorably, bike manufacturers have realised a cheaper version of their pro race bike will not do. Specialized was the first to launch an 'endurance' bike. Now almost every brand has one, but there is still plenty of innovation taking place. The quest is on for the Holy Grail of ultimate comfort without pedalling efficiency being compromised.

Is this the bike for me?

Anyone who rides sportives regularly ought to take a good look at the four bikes in this test and at the alternatives at the end. These are the market leaders. In the good old days a man in a shed used to be able to come up with a game changer. Now that bikes are made of carbon-fibre and a new mould costs tens of thousands of pounds to make, the baton of invention has been passed to the multinationals, who have the R&D budgets to develop new ideas and the means to market them later. To their credit, they really are running with it.

Perhaps this change of emphasis echoes the way cycling has moved from being the sport of the slightly eccentric working class man with just enough money to fund his racing, to what is fast becoming our national pastime.

In these newly corporate cycling times, £1.5k is an average sort of amount to spend on a road bike, so that's where we've pitched this test. For that you can expect a sportive-specific carbon frame and a Shimano 105 groupset or equivalent. The Giant Defy Advanced 1 has Ultegra, one notch up, but that bike is also the joint most expensive here.

Bikes on test

Alongside the Giant Defy Advanced 1 are the Cannondale Carbon Synapse 105 5, the Scott CR1 20 and the Specialized Roubaix SL4 Sport. This last bike is a descendent of the first 'endurance' bike to be launched by anyone.

Each bike has its own proprietary technologies — those things with acronyms, baffling jargon and their own little clickable logos that are the staples of many brand websites — but we try to cut through that and tell you what these bikes are like to ride.

Cannondale Carbon Synapse 105 5 £1,649



Scott CR1 20 £1,399

Head tube

The endurance or sportive-specific bike will have a taller head tube than a race bike for a more upright position that's easier on the back. Its wheelbase will also be longer for more stability, its top tube shorter and its head and seat tube angles on average a degree slacker.

Carbon-fibre

Carbon is the perfect material for a comfort or endurance bike. Because lay-ups can be changed according to what sort of ride quality is desired, it can be super-compliant in some areas and very unyielding in others. The big challenge is to make a bike that has plenty of give in the vertical plane but that is still stiff laterally under pedalling forces.

Shimano 105

What has always been regarded as Shimano's 'workhorse' groupset is standard at this price point. However, it's still expensive and all four bikes have found ways to substitute cheaper parts where possible — own-brand brake calipers are a favourite.

Specialized Roubaix SL4 Sport £1,500

Giant Defy Advanced 1 £1,649

Zertz insert

These little sections of shock-absorbing viscoelastic material aim to stop vibrations reaching the rider's body. This is Specialized's patented method — all the bikes here have their own way of enhancing comfort and eliminating road shock.

£1,500 What to expect

- A quality carbon frame with design features that enhance comfort
- Broad gear ranges to cope with all types of terrain over a distance
- Internal cabling
- Relatively inexpensive wheels

Scott CR1 20 £1,399

Clearly comfort and speed aren't mutually exclusive

Scott's CR1 started life as a super-light race bike in the days when people thought its sub-kilo frame was surely as low as any sensible, responsible bike manufacturer would ever go.

Since then, while other bikes — including Scott's own — have got even lighter, the CR1 has had an endurance makeover. Although it would be unfair to call it sensible, the latest generation of CR1s are built for comfort not for speed.

Frameset

Scott was — and still is — one of the leading lights in carbon technology. Like Giant has with the Defy Advanced, the Swiss-American company has used the carbon-fibre itself to create a comfortable-riding frame without resorting to inserts or unconventional-looking tube shapes. The CR1 looks like a normal bike. However, under the lacquer are the trademarked technologies beloved by bike manufacturers: IMP is Scott's proprietary process for replacing excess material at the head tube intersection with stressed high-modulus fibres. In other words, Scott makes the frame lighter by using smaller quantities of superior material in key areas. SDS allows controlled deformation, or flexing, in the rear triangle in an S shape. These SDS rear stays have a unique tube structure, thickness, and shape, according to Scott.

With its straight tubes arranged in the conventional way, some might say it lacks excitement visually. Also the professional peloton — which tends to

d dictate which colour is 'in' — has moved on from green and black, leaving the CR1 20 looking a bit 2013.

The sportive-specific geometry is similar to that of the other bikes on test, with the head tube that much taller and the top tube that much shorter than their race-bike counterparts, but the Scott is subtly longer and lower than the Giant, making it feel slightly more aggressive than the full-on endurance bike.

Components

The CR1 20 is the middle bike in a range of three, and the cheapest in this test. However, Scott is generous enough with the 105 components: the calipers are downgraded but still made by Shimano. Our test bike has a triple, which is the Shimano R536 model; with the commoner compact double you'd get the RS500, which is a non-series budget chainset that is based on the design of the older 10-speed groupset — i.e. doesn't have the latest four-arm spider — but matches black 105 visually and works perfectly well too.



ALTERNATIVE

Scott CR1 10 £1,699

The top model in the CR1 range gets Ultegra shifting and Shimano RS11 wheels — which still aren't light, but combined with Ultegra components ought to bring the bike in sub 19lb for the larger sizes. The CR1 10 has a more exciting paint scheme too, and could just as easily have figured in this test as it's only £50 dearer than the Giant Defy Advanced 1.





Specification

Frameset: CR1 carbon/IMP technology
Gears: Shimano 105 30-speed 12-30t
Chainset: Shimano R563 50/39/30
Brakes: Shimano R561
Wheels: Syncros Race 27/Formula
Tyres: Schwalbe Lugano 23c
Handlebar: Syncros RR2.0
Stem: Syncros FL2.0
Saddle: Syncros Road Endurance
Seatpost: Syncros RR1.4 carbon
Size range: XXS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Weight: 19.5lb
Size tested: L
Contact: www.scott-sports.com



The compact version of course gets the latest 11-speed (5800) 105 shifting.

Wheels

As with many bikes at this price point, the wheels are bit of a let-down. The Syncros Race 27s on Formula hubs (20 spokes front/24 rear) do the job but with a better pair of wheels the Scott frame would really come alive. Our advice, once again, is to treat these as wheels to keep you going while you save up or negotiate with your better half for lighter ones.

Schwalbe Lugano tyres are par for the course — Cannondale also uses them for the Synapse Carbon 5 105 in this test. Incidentally, the clearance between the chainstays is very tight and a 25c tyre is very close on both sides. At a guess this frame was designed for 23c tyres, again suggesting it needs updating.

Riding

The CR1 20 looks conventional, and rides relatively normally too — and this is by no means a criticism. A fluffy sportive bike that goes to extreme lengths to protect newbie middle-aged men's stiff backs and cushion their saggy posteriors is all well and good, but what happens when said middle-aged man gets serious about his cycling and his body begins to make the necessary adaptions that enable him to sit more efficiently and more aerodynamically on his bike? You can buy a longer stem and slam it, but that's it. The Scott, however, is that little bit closer to a race bike so that training rides rather than nuddling 'all-day epics' are possible. Yes, you may still need to slam the stem if you want a 20mph average, but the Scott feels reassuringly firm as well as pleasantly comfortable.

Scott has hedged its bets and not taken the sportive shilling quite as eagerly as other manufacturers. As such the CR1 20 has a broader appeal.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	17/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL RATING	87 /100

Specialized Roubaix SL4 Sport £1,500

The original endurance bike is still the one to beat

Specialized was ahead of the curve when it introduced the Roubaix in 2004. There was no such thing as an 'endurance' bike up until that point; the only sportive anyone had heard of was L'Etape and future MAMILs were still three-stone overweight and propping up the bar at their local golf club all weekend.

Frameset

The 11 years since Specialized launched the Roubaix have seen the Californian company's rivals launch their own endurance bikes, each with various comfort-adding solutions, and each claiming to provide a smoother, faster ride than all the rest.

Specialized has stuck with its system of inserting shock-absorbing viscoelastic dampers in the fork, seatstays and seatpost, which it calls Zertz, but meanwhile has continued to develop and improve the Roubaix frame around these squidgy bits.

The carbon lay-up and tube diameters are now sized according to the size of the frame to ensure the smallest bike isn't super-stiff or the largest overly flexible. The CG-R seatpost is another recent arrival: with a zig-zag in it that neatly echoes the Z for Zertz, it's certainly great for marketing — but it has a less certain appeal for more conventional riders.

Those same people might not be too keen on the bile-green paint that Specialized calls Hyper Gloss; fortunately there's also Satin Charcoal/Black/White (AKA monochrome).

Components

Shimano 105 5800 covers most of the groupset — shifters and derailleurs, with the longer cage version at the rear, as you'd expect — but whereas Cannondale uses the original 105 calipers, Specialized has specced cheaper Axis 1.0 brakes. These don't feel as refined as 105 calipers but do not lack power.

The bar and stem are from Specialized's own Comp range, and are very good. The Comp Multi stem is a highlight — this comes with three eccentric shims that fit over the fork steerer, allowing the stem angle to be adjusted by up to eight degrees with each. An offset stem bolt placement and +/- in the top cap means the bolt goes in straight whether the stem is tilted forward or back.

It's a clever way to fine-tune position, has a weight penalty of just a few grams and is so discreet that only the initiated will know it's an adjustable stem.



EXPLAINER

CG-R carbon seatpost

Specialized calls the CG-R post a "revolutionary design" and it's true that there's nothing else like it out there. Made from FACT carbon, it has a standard 27.2mm diameter, but what's different is the section just below the aluminium head, where it thrusts forward and back again around a Zertz insert to create a Zertz sandwich, allowing a claimed 18mm of travel.





Specification

Frame: FACT 8r
carbon
Gears: Shimano 105 5800 11-32
Chainset: FSA Gossamer BB30
Brakes: Axis 1.0
Wheels: Axis 2.0
Tyres: Specialized Espoir Elite 25c
Handlebar: Specialized Comp alloy
Stem: Specialized Multi Comp
Saddle: Specialized Toupe
Seatpost: Specialized CG-R
Size range: 49, 52, 54, 56, 58, 61cm
Weight: 19.1lb
Size tested: 56cm
Contact: www.specialized.com



Wheels

The Axis 2.0 wheels with 24 spokes in front and 32 out back ought to be regarded as stopgaps until you can upgrade them. They are heavy, lack feel and are not compatible in performance terms with such a sophisticated frame. However, as with the other bikes with expensive frames in this test, if the Roubaix SL4 is to be available at £1.5K, savings must be made — so it's not exactly a complaint.

The Specialized Espoir Elite 25c tyres seem fine, but with a TPI count of just 60 are unavoidably at the bottom end of the tyre performance spectrum.

Riding

Compared to its racier peers, the early Roubaix bikes were truly unique. Now, inevitably, the competition has caught up. Probably for this reason, the latest Roubaix doesn't feel as startlingly comfortable as the early ones, though if you rode them back-to-back the modern one would almost certainly be superior in every way. Now, compared to some of the very soft, very upright endurance bikes, the Roubaix is almost racy — not a bad thing. The steering is incredibly direct, despite its front-centre measurement being 10mm longer and fork rake 5mm more than its Tarmac SL4 racing cousin. This feels slightly at odds with the comfortable rear, especially at slower speeds — for example, while climbing in the saddle — you need to pay attention, as it changes direction so quickly. The Roubaix is pleasingly stiff for out-of-the-saddle climbing and accelerating, though is rather heavy, at over 19lb.

Weight aside, Specialized has got the balance between comfort and excitement just right with the latest Roubaix SL4. While 'sportive-specific' features might compromise straight-out speed in some bikes, there's no doubt the Roubaix SL4 can go fast.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	19/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	91 /100

Giant Defy Advanced 1 £1,649

Radical-looking all-new sportive superbike

Giant has completely redesigned the Defy range of endurance bikes for 2015. All seven carbon models have disc brakes — ‘disc brake integration’ is what Giant calls it, and it certainly makes sense from a performance point of view, not to mention continuity and perhaps economics, to use the same method of stopping throughout.

The Shimano Ultegra-equipped Defy Advanced 1 is the top bike in its sub-category of three. Above Defy Advanced are the Advanced Pro and Advanced SL models. Below are the aluminium-framed, caliper-braked Defy models (no ‘Advanced’ suffix for them). With its Ultegra groupset — one rung up the groupset ladder from the 105-equipped bikes in this test, the ‘1’ in its name could quite easily stand for one-upmanship.

Frameset

Since it introduced the original Mike Burrows-designed TCR, Giant has been a trendsetter. Now, nearly 20 years on, if you were to pick one frame that defined 2015 above all others, the Defy Advanced might be it. The strong, straight lines, uninterrupted by chunks of viscoelastic or tubes that divide into two, speak of quiet advances in composites technology.

Giant has achieved a clean, uncluttered look that other manufacturers would kill for. The disc brakes allow internal cable routing to be very neatly done, and all on the non-drive side. Like Cannondale, Giant has dispensed with the

traditional seatpost collar and uses an expanding wedge system that has its bolt hidden under a rubber cover. The carbon seatpost itself has a ‘D’ profile — Giant has named it D-Fuse — and is designed to damp vibration and flex backwards to absorb shocks.

The head tube is enormous, both in height and reinforcement. The size L, which has a 57.5cm effective top tube, has a 20.5cm head tube. Of course if you don’t like the sit-up-and-beg endurance geometry, Giant can point you in the direction of its much faster bikes that are raced at the top level of professional cycling.

Components

It’s frankly incredible to see Ultegra on this frame at this price. Giant has passed on to the consumer its stupendous purchasing power as the world’s largest bike manufacturer. Ultegra’s shifting is just that crucial bit smoother than the 105 equipment of the other bikes in this test, which inevitably enhances the overall ride experience.



EXPLAINER

D-Fuse seatpost

Unlike Specialized’s CG-R seatpost, Giant’s D-Fuse is specific to the Defy Advanced range, as it has a D-shaped profile so won’t fit into a standard round seat tube. With the flat section facing backwards, the D-Fuse seatpost is allowed to flex in that direction under load. Like Cannondale, Specialized has replaced the traditional seatpost collar with a wedge system so that it can flex from a lower point.





Specification

Frameset: Advanced-grade composite
Gears: Shimano Ultegra 6800 11-28t
Chainset: Shimano Ultegra 6800 50/34
Brakes: TRP Spyre mechanical disc
Wheels: Giant P-R2 disc
Tires: Giant P-R3, Flat Guard, front and rear specific, 25c
Handlebar: Giant Contact alu
Stem: Giant Contact alu
Saddle: Giant Performance Road
Seatpost: Giant D-Fuse
Size range: S, M, M/L, L, XL
Weight: 19.6lb
Size tested: L
Contact: www.giantbicycles.com



The TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes, however, are not on the same level as the Giant frame and Shimano groupset. Certainly they stop the bike adequately via the 160mm rotors, but they offer no obvious advantage in power or modulation over the cheapest of the own-brand rim calipers in this test.

Wheels

Giant's own PR-2 disc wheels look great with their semi-deep-section rims that are brake-track-free, but they're not light overall. However, as the rims themselves can be built lighter, the lower rotating mass does accelerate surprisingly well.

Giant's own 25c tyres, which are front and rear specific, seemed fine.

Riding

The Defy Advanced 1 is supremely comfortable. The D-Fuse seat tube flexes noticeably to cushion the rider's rear end. However, we did notice a hint of what mountain bikers call 'bob' under hard pedalling in a big gear on the flat – where the saddle moves with each pedal stroke. Perhaps Giant, like the other manufacturers of so-called endurance bikes, has created both the problem and the solution with upright geometry: ideally, a proportion of a rider's weight should be supported by the arms. If it isn't, the posterior will obviously need extra cushioning, which may have unwanted consequences.

Very upright geometry can throw up handling problems too: perhaps if the head tube were a little shorter, allowing the rider to get his or her weight over the front in corners, it wouldn't need to be quite so overbuilt.

However, that's another discussion for another day. The Giant Defy Advanced 1 is more than fit for the purpose for which it was designed, i.e. as a smooth-riding endurance bike – but if you want a gold medal in your sportive, there are faster bikes out there.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	19/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL RATING	93/100

Cannondale Synapse Carbon 105 5 £1,649

Game-changing endurance bike with an affordable build

Cannondale's redesigned sportive model has been very well received. Evolving with the endurance riding scene itself, the latest Synapse is closer to a race bike than was the original version: its stack height is lower, meaning increasingly fit sportive riders can achieve a more aggressive position than before. However, it has lost none of the famous comfortable ride. Thanks to some clever tube profiling, carbon layups and angles, it might now be even softer.

Frameset

Cannondale has invested heavily in the Synapse Carbon and has created a very sophisticated frame with some unique features. Visually most striking is the Power Pyramid seat tube, which splits into an asymmetric arch just above the BB30A bottom bracket shell. To enhance comfort, Cannondale has designed a 'micro suspension' by manipulating tube shapes and designating zones where the carbon flexes under load. The chainstays and seatstays are flattened towards the rear dropouts and the full-carbon fork has offset dropouts that Cannondale claims allow it to track more smoothly over rough surfaces, working as a system with the rear triangle.

It may be the aluminium seatpost that contributes the most to the smooth ride. Cannondale uses a 25.4mm diameter — very skinny by today's oversized standards — with a collarless clamp (the bolt is hidden under a rubber cover on the top tube), which allows it to

flex from a lower point. This not only works well but looks clean, too.

The internal cable-routing enhances the clean look — the rear brake cable deserves a special mention for the radical-looking entry point in the front of the head tube — and is well executed with no rattling at all.

Components

There's no skimping on Shimano 105 components; the compact 50/34 chainset is an FSA Gossamer Pro but that's because Shimano does not make one that fits Cannondale's BB30A 73mm bottom bracket shell without adaptor cups.

This model is just one up from the entry-level Synapse Carbon 105 6, but still specs the original 105 calipers. The 105 rear derailleur is the longer-cage version that wraps enough chain to handle a 28t largest sprocket. The bar, stem and seatpost are Cannondale



**Skinny seatpost
is unique to
the Synapse**



EXPLAINER

Power Pyramid

Frame-builders have experimented with split seat tubes since the dawn of cycling — but Cannondale's application is a novel one. The seat tube flattens and divides just above the BB shell, creating an asymmetric arch with a span of 73mm (the width of the BB shell) with the drive-side half slightly thicker to even out pedalling forces. Cannondale says this creates maximum stiffness with minimal weight.





Specification

Frameset BallisTec Carbon, Di2 ready
Gears Shimano 105 5800, 11-32
Chainset FSA Gossamer Pro 50/34
Brakes Shimano 105 5800
Wheels Shimano RS11
Tyres Schwalbe Lugano 25c
Handlebar Cannondale C3 alloy
Stem Cannondale C3 alloy
Saddle Prologo Kappa Evo
Seatpost Cannondale alloy 25.4
Size range 48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm
Weight 18.8lb
Size tested 56cm
www.cannondale.com



own-brand. On the size 56 tested, the 100mm stem made the cockpit feel a little short, even for a sportive-specific bike. Of course, replacing the stem would be straightforward.

Wheels

The Synapse frame really deserves better than the heavy, budget Shimano RS11s, so it's to its credit that it still manages to feel bright and fast despite hauling in excess of 1,800g of wheels. However, Cannondale is offering the frame at a particular price point with this spec — which incidentally is £200 lower than last year's RRP — so savings must be made somewhere. The Schwalbe Lugano 25c tyres are perfectly good.

Riding

The plushness of the Synapse Carbon is exceptional — so much so, it takes some getting used to. Usually a bike that feels this soft has a puncture, so one's brain has to recalibrate itself in order to stop ordering those little bursts of panic adrenaline. The best way to recalibrate mentally is to show the brain that the Synapse Carbon accelerates and then cruises like a race bike, while keeping its rider's contact points metaphorically wrapped in cotton wool.

Once you've adapted to such an unfamiliar cycling sensation, you begin to discover that, although it isolates you from vibrations and bumps in an unexpected way, the Synapse Carbon handles the traditional highlights of a ride such as steep descents and sharp corners like an old pro — in a way not at odds with the plush feel. Creating a holistic 'endurance' ride — rather than mere token gestures towards comfort that compromise handling — is the hardest challenge, but Cannondale has achieved it. Front and rear, vertical and lateral are all perfectly balanced.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	20/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	20/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	95/100

Winner: Cannondale Synapse Carbon 105 5

Keith Bontrager's famous and frequently-quoted aphorism "Strong. Light. Cheap. Pick two" could be expanded somehow to include "comfortable" and "efficient" for the purposes of this test. It's no easy task to design both of these qualities into bikes costing in the region of £1,500 and still expect them to be reasonably light and fast (strong is a given).

Giant appears to have bred all its race pedigree out of the Defy Advanced 1. It's more trekking pony than thoroughbred, but with such a vast range the Taiwanese company can afford to create bikes for very specific purposes: the Defy Advanced is "the choice for comfort and control" according to Giant's blurb and you can't argue with that. It is the softest-riding bike in this test but it lacks zip. Well, if you want a race bike get the Propel or the TCR, Giant might say with some justification. What we can say is if you like your sportives run off at a fairly brisk pace, the Defy Advanced 1 is not the bike for you. For the "epic solo adventures" that Giant talks about in its marketing material, it's absolutely spot on.

The Specialized Roubaix SL4, on the other hand, takes sportier riding in its Zertz-damped stride. The very stiff front end rules in fast, sweeping, downhill corners. However, at slow speeds the rigid front can feel a little at odds with the bouncy back. You get used to this particular characteristic quite quickly, but riding these four test bikes back to back it's noticeable. With some lighter wheels the Roubaix SL4 could be race-bike speedy.

The Scott is the subtlest bike on test. The other three have eye-catching features so as to be instantly recognisable even without a name on the down tube. These are the modern versions of Hetchins and Bates. So the CR1 20 comes over as a little anonymous, perhaps lacking character. However, Scott lets the ride quality do the talking, and it's definitely worth a listen. If you're after a versatile machine for club riding and sportives that doesn't want to be pigeonholed as a comfort bike, this is a good choice.

The Cannondale Synapse Carbon 105 5 wins because it's exciting both to ride and to look at. And due to currency fluctuations the RRP has come down £200 since it launched. This is an incredibly smooth bike that manages to factor comfort, balance, efficiency, aesthetics and price into the equation in a way that the other three don't quite manage. Pure class.

CYCLING
ACTIVE
**BEST BIKE
ON TEST**



ALTERNATIVES

Classics-winning pedigree **Trek Domane 4.1** £1,400

Trek say the Domane is the world's best endurance bike — but they would, wouldn't they? To back up their claim Fabian Cancellara has won Paris-Roubaix and the Tour of Flanders — the two toughest cobbled Classics on the calendar — on it, and if it's good enough for him...

www.trekbikes.com



Fat-tyred cobble muncher **BMC Granfondo GF02 105** £1,800

Another endurance bike that was developed with a racing team and has been ridden in the Spring Classics. It has a super-soft ride, monster clearance and comes with 28c tyres as standard.

www.evanscycles.com



Direct-sales easy rider **Canyon Endurace CF 9.0** £1,549

Canyon is new on the endurance bike scene but it already has a very accomplished bike in the Endurace. VCLS (vertical compliance, lateral stiffness) is Canyon's proprietary technology. The VCLS seatpost, which works like a leaf spring, is Canyon's signature comfort component.

www.canyon.com





UPGRADE TIP

Mavic Ksyrium Elite S £525

Wheels make more difference to ride feel than any other component. All four of these bikes come with budget wheels to bring them in cheap, and without exception they would benefit enormously from a lighter set. Mavic has a wheel for every type of cycle and cycling discipline, so the Ksyrium Elite S is just a suggestion because we know for a fact that they're great wheels and weigh around 500g/1lb lighter than the low-end Shimano RS series that are generally specced to save money.

www.mavic.com

CANNONDALE SYNAPSE CARBON 105 5 £1,649



95
/100

GIANT DEFY ADVANCED 1 £1,649



93
/100

SPECIALIZED ROUBAIX SL4 SPORT £1,500



91
/100

SCOTT CR1 20 £1,399



90
/100

Spot on...

- State-of-the-art frame
- Balanced ride
- £200 cheaper than when it launched last year

Near miss

- Heavy wheels

Spot on...

- Futuristic frame
- Super comfortable
- Ultegra groupset

Near miss

- Lacks zip

Spot on...

- Smooth ride
- Fast steering

Near miss

- Cheap calipers and wheels
- Hyper gloss (lime green) paintjob

Spot on...

- No gimmicky tube shapes
- Good value
- Blends raciness with comfort

Near miss

- Aesthetically unexciting

7 OF THE BEST

Women's saddles

Are you sitting comfortably? Or does your backside wallow in woe every time you hit the road? CA reviews seven women's saddles with a view to negating discomfort

Words Louise Mahé

Riding lots can, quite literally, be a pain in the arse as you're repeatedly sitting in the same position for hours on end. For that reason, finding a decent saddle that suits your body shape and riding style is crucial. With women's anatomy being different to men's there's an obvious need to try a saddle specifically designed to suit female riders.

As more women have come into the sport, the demand for women-specific saddles has increased and brands have responded. Much

research and testing has gone into making and adapting saddles so they are more suited for females. Most female-specific saddles are wider than men's models to cater for women's sit bones, which are further apart, whilst many also feature cut-away areas, or softer nose sections, to cater for soft tissue. Even when narrowing saddle choice down to women-specific models there's still a wide variety, so we've picked out a few of the best to put through their paces.

We highly recommend trying before buying

though, as saddle choice is very personal. Many brands and shops offer this service, and usually you'll know pretty soon if a saddle is for you or not. But if you do get the wrong one, along with the try before you buy schemes, certain brands offer money back or exchange, as they understand the importance of finding the right saddle. It is always worth forking out a little more if you find one that is super comfortable, over a cheaper, slightly less comfortable one, as there's nothing more off-putting when you're riding than saddle discomfort.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Width

Saddles should support a rider's sit bones, not the entire bottom. This means that even if you have a large rear end, your sit bones could still be narrow as it's about bone structure. Generally speaking, women have wider sit bones than men, but like anything anatomical this still varies and some brands cater for this with saddles coming in different sizes. It's worth noting that leisure riders tend to have a more upright position on the bike, meaning more weight goes through the sit bones than it does with racers.

Shape

Saddles come in many different shapes as well as sizes. Racers favour flatter saddles, as they can adopt a lower, more aggressive position on their bikes. Rounded saddles give more room for movement and suit those who shift around more when riding — often a preferred choice for leisure riders looking for comfort during longer rides. Semi-rounded options give the best of both worlds, and are perfect for those who are unsure which style may suit them.

Pressure relief

When riding for any length of time, relieving pressure from those sensitive soft tissue areas is important. Being uncomfortable on your saddle can lead to not wanting to even look at a bike again, and many women struggle with pressure and even numbness. Specifically designed cut-outs or channels aim to help relieve the pressure on these sensitive areas. Not all female-specific saddles have them, but it's a common sight on most. If you suffer with this make sure you choose a saddle with pressure relief.



Prologo Kappa Evo T2.0 £54.99

The Kappa Evo's semi-round design is great for those unsure what style suits them best. On longer rides it came into its own, with enough padding to reduce road buzz, but not so much that it got in the way. Despite coming in just one width — 147mm — the Kappa Evo suited my sit bones perfectly, giving ample support over long distances, and no worry of rubbing the

side of my legs. The lack of specific pressure relief design on this saddle was an issue when moving into a more forward position.

A very comfortable design, which just lacked a pressure relief system

www.i-ride.co.uk



Specialized Oura Expert Gel £80

After recently testing another of Specialized's women's saddles for sister magazine *Cycling Weekly*, and loving it, I expected great things from the Oura Expert Gel. However, I struggled with the Oura, which emphasises how specific saddle choice is. The Oura was too padded and rounded for my liking, making it feel like I'd sunk into the saddle. My sit bones felt unsupported and I struggled to put the

power down. Coming in three different widths, and with Specialized offering a 30-day exchange period, if you're not comfortable or happy with your choice, it's still worth a try for tourers.

A great option for those who like well-padded, more rounded saddles

www.specialized.com



Fizik Vesta £89.99

The Vesta's curved shape enables riders to move around when riding, to find that comfortable and efficient position for them. I found a comfortable position quite quickly, which supported my sit bones really well during long rides. Despite having narrow sit bones for a woman, and the Vesta being quite wide, I had no issues with leg rub when pedalling, due to the WingFlex technology Fizik

uses in its saddles. The channel running along the saddle really helped relieve any pressure on sensitive soft tissue, making getting into a more forward position easier.

The Vesta's curved shape was comfortable and the channel kept pressure off soft tissue

10

www.extralink.co.uk



Selle Italia Diva Gel Flow £82.99

Established in 1897, Selle Italia knows a thing or two about saddles. However, the large amount of gel padding on this offering seemed unnecessary, felt bulky and gave little added comfort or support to my sit bones. Similarly the overly large cut-out was in the wrong position to give much relief from soft tissue pressure. If anything, it made it worse, though this may be due to my

preferred forward position. Those with wider sit bones or who ride in a more upright position, would probably get on better with the Gel Flow.

With a 30-day money back guarantee it's worth a try for those who ride in an upright position

6

www.chickencycles.co.uk



Forza Cirrus women's saddle £49.99

Being the lowest priced saddle on test, just, the Forza Cirrus had a curved design that I struggled to get on with. Despite having a cut-out running down the centre, I still felt pressure on my soft tissue area when riding, especially when in a more forward position.

However, when riding in a more upright position, the Cirrus suited my narrower sit

bones, at only 142mm wide, and I felt well supported when riding long distances. When commuting I did find there was little padding, lending to quite a harsh ride on potholed roads.

A low priced saddle that suits those who like sitting more upright

www.todayscyclist.co.uk



Selle Royal Supra unisex saddle £59.99

Part of the Selle Performa (premium) range, the Supra is a unisex design. I was not disappointed though and the Supra supported my sit bones well. Coming in one width, 144mm, which is usually the narrowest size for brands that offer multiple options, it suits riders with narrower sit bones. The long nose gave lots of room to move about, and the small cut-out and channel reduced

pressure on the soft tissue when riding. With quite hard padding it gave a fairly harsh ride, especially during pothole filled commutes.

Although a unisex saddle, this was impressive, particularly for those with narrow sit bones

www.raleigh.co.uk



Pro Falcon Lady 152mm £74.99

The 152mm width tested definitely suits riders with wider sit bones. Fit correctly, the Falcon Lady offers comfort and alleviates any pressure points thanks to its cut-out design and additional rear padding. It's also available in 142mm meaning it's worth getting measured up before purchasing. With a carbon reinforced base, titanium rails and a flat profile design, there

are plenty of performance features to make things more racy, but this didn't come at the expense of comfort; in fact I sat happily from the very first ride.

Aesthetically pleasing, with pressure-relieving features for two sit bone widths

8

www.madison.co.uk



VERDICT

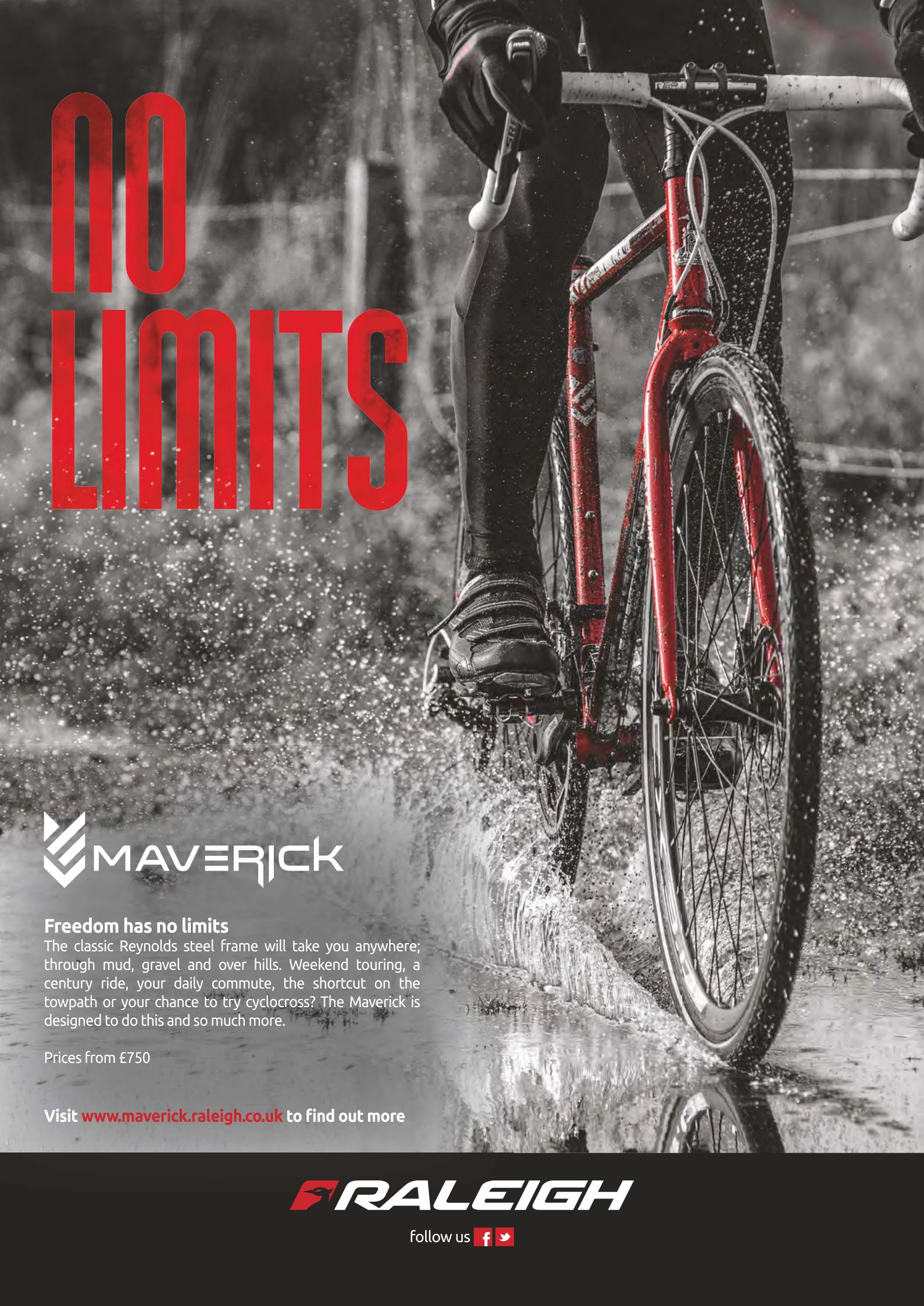
If you are having saddle issues it can be a nightmare, so when choosing a perch it's important to try a few different brand and design options to find the best for you. Many shops offer test saddles and it's a good idea to take advantage of that.

The Fizik Vesta really stood out, thanks to its curved and wider design. Despite being a unisex saddle, Selle Royal's offering also suited us well, but this may not be the best option for those with wider sit bones. The Pro Falcon impressed too in the women-specific stakes, and ticks the box for wider hips.

Despite unfortunately not getting on with either the Specialized or Selle Italia saddles, these two brands offer 30-day exchanges or money-back guarantees, making them solid options to try. Both of these would suit those with wider sit bones and those who ride in a more upright position, which is probably why we struggled to get on with them.



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RALEIGH

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Sub-£2k carbon aero race bikes

Two fast racers go head-to-head

Words Daniel Baines Pictures Chris Catchpole

Close clearances

Closing up gaps that would hinder the air as it flowed over the bike is of primary importance for aerodynamics.

Low front end

Designing a slippery bike is no good if the rider's sitting up in the wind like a sail.

Giant Propel Advanced 2, £1,399



Aero bikes have been around for quite a few years now, but it's only recently that they have started to appear at sensible prices. The idea is simple: make the frame as aerodynamic as possible to cheat the air that you're travelling through. Often, though, the execution isn't so easily done. For some companies, striving for aerodynamics has meant thousands of dedicated hours to get the best results — there's a lot more to it than throwing a bike in a wind tunnel and fiddling with dimensions.

To complicate things even further, there isn't one perfect aero frame shape, as wind direction changes. This has to be taken into account to find the shape that is the best compromise. Some aero frames are better at heading directly into the wind, while others show less drag from more acute angles.

On top of this, manufacturers have to take into consideration things that will hinder aerodynamics, like the 'dirty air' produced by moving legs or bottle cages.

Traditional frame dilemmas, such as weight,

stiffness and compliance, must also be taken into account. Aero bikes generally use more carbon fibre, which results in a small but not insignificant weight penalty. Oval shapes aren't generally as stiff as the traditional round tubing we're now used to seeing on carbon bikes either.

The good news is that many of the aero frames on the market today are derived from top-of-the-range race machines from a few years ago, using the same or very similar moulds as current pro-level race bikes. Of course, there are compromises; the quality of production and materials have to be selected to keep the RRP affordable.

Mekk v Giant

The Propel comes from the world's biggest bike manufacturer, Giant. That wealth of experience, combined with being such a production heavyweight, makes for low prices that not many can compete with, which is great news for the consumer.

British brand Mekk may be a relative newcomer to bike building, but that's not to

say its designers lack experience. Mark Edwards and Ken Knight have decades of experience between them, importing, building and racing, which they combine with real passion, epitomising the ethos of the independent bike builder.

Last year I tested the previous incarnations of both the Propel and Mekk, and was impressed immensely by the results. A year later, things have got even better.

Sub-£2K aero bikes What to expect

- Internal cable routing
- Race-ready geometry
- Profiled oversize tubes and junctions

Mekk Primo 6.2 £1,999.99



Oversize junctions

Profiled tubes aren't as stiff as round ones. To compensate for this, junctions are beefed up to reduce flex in the key areas.

Mekk Primo 6.2 £1,999.99

Versatile race bike with deep-section wheels

When I tested the Primo 6 last year, I came to the conclusion that it was a solid performer, as it impressed me with its fantastic balance and racy handling. However, the one thing I did criticise was the wheels. The Mavic Aksiums that were supplied, despite being a good wheelset, just didn't give the bike the spec to match up to the best of its rivals. It may have sounded harsh, but then I was comparing it to the very best you could get at that price.

It seems with the Primo 6.2, Mekk has addressed that all-important issue.

Frameset

The four models in the Primo range are all based on the same frameset, and then specced differently. As such, the frame hasn't changed in the year since I last rode the bike.

It has all the aero credentials we've come to expect: a horizontal top tube, oval down tube, bladed forks, curvy junctions and internal cable routing to name but a few. The 3K carbon-fibre is what you would expect on a bike at this price and offers a good compromise of weight, compliance and stiffness.

Nice touches include the hidden seatpost bolt, and a tapered steerer tube, brought in to add stiffness up front.

Components

Comprising a full Shimano 105 groupset, you know you're going to get good reliable service. It now comes as 11-speed and has the excellent dual pivot brakes that have trickled down the Shimano range from higher up. The changing is precise and smooth and feels solid to use.

The 36/52t chainset is a great choice, offering gears to suit the type of riding that this bike will be used for. Up front, the finishing kit consists of alloy Saturae stem and handlebars, finished off with Saturae tape.

The San Marco saddle isn't the money-saving perch that some manufacturers may spec. In use I didn't notice it, which is exactly what you want from a saddle.

Wheels

The full carbon Saturae C50 deep section rims are the jewel in the crown.

UPGRADE

Alloy wheelset

This is not an upgrade so much as a wheel-saving downgrade; having a pair of aluminium winter wheels to fall back on is never a bad option. If you do ride all-year round it's something we'd recommend — not only will harsh winter weather soon wear out your carbon rims but you'll get more progressive and reliable braking too, something essential in wet weather. It will also save you grimacing every time you apply the brakes and hear the ear-piercing squeal associated with braking on carbon rims.



Shimano 105 groupset
is specced in its entirety

"The handling is responsive thanks to the race orientated geometry"

At 50mm deep they may seem a bit daunting or overly bling if you're not used to them, but they are actually a fantastic addition to the bike. It's great to see that Mekk has reversed its speccing here, and still managed not to compromise elsewhere. They complement the aero frame beautifully.

Following the current trend for wider rims, the C50s allow the running of a slightly wider tyre. This helps air flow around the rest of the wheel and also has the advantage of increasing the tyre's footprint, affording more grip.

Riding

There are no doubts that this is a racing bike first and foremost — the handling is responsive and comes thanks to the race-orientated geometry. If you can get your position right, the poise and balance of the bike make the Primo a pleasure to ride at speed.

That said, it shouldn't put you off the bike if you're not going to race. The Primo



isn't so harsh that long distances become uncomfortable and tiring. The C50s handled rough UK roads admirably, without being noticeably flexy. At 1,640g, the wheels aren't the fastest at accelerating, but once you get them to a good speed, they will help you maintain it. You'd be hard pushed to find something much lighter anyway for the price.

Riding in late winter proved that the rims were versatile. The curved inside profile of the rim helped to keep the bike going in a straight line, even on really blustery days.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	20/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	92/100

Specification

Frameset:	Monocoque carbon frame with aero carbon fork
Gears:	Shimano 105 11-speed
Chainset:	Shimano 105 105, 52/36t
Brakes:	Shimano 105 dual pivot
Wheels:	Saturae C50 full carbon clincher
Tires:	Continental Grand Sport Race 700x23mm
Bars:	Saturae CURVE
Stem:	Saturae
Saddle:	San Marco Era Dynamic Protek Carbon Aero
Weight:	8.44kg/18.10lb
Size tested:	54cm
	www.mekk-bicycles.com





Semi-compact chainset
makes light work of the hills



Deep-section carbon rims offer
high-end performance and comfort



Giant Propel Advanced 2 £1,399

Race-proven design with cutting-edge aesthetics

Last year when I tested the Mekk Primo 6, one of the outstanding bikes I was putting it against was the Giant Propel Advanced 3. At £1,999 they were direct rivals price-wise. This year, interestingly, Giant has managed to offer a very similar spec'd bike for a whopping £600 less.

Inevitable compromises aside, the Propel Advanced 2 is nonetheless a close derivative of the race bike that ace German road sprinter Marcel Kittel has won eight stages of the Tour de France on. It's a race-winning pedigree.

Frameset

Giant really went to town when designing the Propel frameset and when it launched just over two years ago it caused a storm. Although fairly late to the aero road market, what Giant produced didn't look like anything else that was available at the time, and proved to be one step ahead of the opposition.

The most significant change to the frameset from last year's model is the fork. Like the Mekk, it is tapered, but it features an alloy steerer instead of carbon-fibre. Performance-wise there's not much difference; however, there is a weight penalty.

Looking over the frame, you appreciate that form really does follow function; there isn't a tube that doesn't change size or shape anywhere. Traditional-looking this isn't.

Components

Saving money on spec usually results in the chainset being downgraded from the rest of the groupset, so it's no surprise here that Giant has done that. As components go, the Shimano RS500 makes no discernible difference to the workings of the bike, but does add extra weight. It also limits the chainring choice to a compact 34/50t, something that fast riders may find too low. It's a shame there isn't a semi-compact 36/52t choice available in the chainset range.

The brake calipers would also normally be subject to change; however,

ADVICE

Chainset rub

Both Shimano chainsets here are finished in black. They look good and complement the bikes well. However, do be careful to set up your shoe position correctly. If your overshoes are bulky around the heel it can quickly lead to the anodising being worn off as they rub the crank during pedalling. It's unsightly more than anything else, but will obviously stand out on bikes that look as good as these.



"The frame is stiff and you can feel your effort being transferred to the tarmac"

the integrated brake system is unique to Giant. Furthering the minimal drag idea of the Propel, the SpeedControl SLs are neatly tucked away behind the seat stays and fork respectively. In effect, they are no more than simple V brakes, with more than enough power to stop you, but compared to standard Shimano 105 calipers, modulation is lacking.

The rest of the components consist entirely of in-house kit. It may be lacking in wow factor, but it's one of the reasons this bike is such good value, and it all works well enough.

Wheels

Giant's alloy P-A2 rims are aero in profile and are suited to all-year-round use. Although they're not deep section they will provide some aero benefit, while also providing a good, predictable, hardwearing braking surface.

They are shod with Giant's own-brand tyres, which have proved to be decent enough, offering good grip and decent puncture resistance.

Riding

If you're not convinced that this is a quick bike from its looks, once you head out on to the road you can't fail to notice. The Propel likes to go fast; the frame is stiff and you can feel your effort being transferred to the tarmac. Like all good racing bikes, it's a snappy handler, requiring little effort to line up tight turns; even changing your line in fast, flowing bends feels fine. The road

Specification

Frameset:	Advanced-Grade Composite
Gears:	Shimano 105 11-speed
Chainset:	Shimano RS500, 50/34t
Brakes:	Giant SpeedControl SL
Wheels:	Giant P-A2
Tyres:	Giant P-R3, 700x23mm
Bars:	Giant Contact
Saddle:	Giant Performance Road
Seatpost:	Giant Vector Composite
Stem:	Giant Connect, 38° rise
Weight:	8.54kg / 18.83lb
Size tested:	Medium www.giant-bicycles.com



feedback is good and there is enough poise to avoid a panic.

The Propel Advanced 2 is an exciting bike to ride; the lower you go, the better it seems to get.

The wheels may restrict the potential a little, but then at this price that has to be forgiven. Upgrading to something lighter or deeper would enhance the frame and bring it closer to fulfilling its potential.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	17/20
ROAD HANDLING	20/20
RIDE COMFORT	16/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL RATING	91 /100





Fast and furious

If you want evidence that the bike industry is constantly striving for better quality at a more affordable price, you don't need to look any further than here. A year on, even with other rivals snapping at their heels, both Mekk and Giant are still at the industry forefront.

These bikes really are that impressive, and not just in the aero category either. Moving away from labels, the two stand up well against very good opposition in this fiercely fought price point. I recently rode four non-aero, but comparatively priced, test bikes that appeared in our sister magazine *Cycling Weekly*. Even coming from big brands and well-established opposition they simply didn't excite me like the Propel or the Primo. To ride them is the only way you can judge these two; both feel like a good bike should, offering a rewarding experience that's capable of putting a big smile on your face.

Outstanding feature

There really aren't many comparative bikes that come with such a fine set of wheels as the Primo 6.2 does, and that is to be commended. Saturae may be from the same stable as Mekk, but as we've seen with the bikes it produces that's no bad thing. In a world where you can easily pay

the price of the whole Mekk just for a set of wheels, they offer amazing value for money and can help you go faster, or save energy.

It's difficult to pin down which bike is the fastest here. The Primo's deep section wheels really do save the watts once you're at a fast enough speed. The Propel has the faster frame though, and is stiffer too, so it accelerates more directly. For the £600 saved you could buy some wheels comparable to the C50s and undoubtedly the Propel would be the quickest bike.

Cycling fast isn't always about having the fastest bike though; comfort plays its part. If your body is tired from all the road buzz, before long you'll slow down. The stiff frame and direct, responsive nature of the Propel has to be taken into consideration.

It should be remembered that even at £1,399, the Propel is still a racing bike. If short races on smooth tarmac are your thing, then it's one of

MEKK PRIMO 6.2
£1,999.99

92
/100

Spot on...

- Wheels are good value on a bike this price.
- Full Shimano 105 groupset

Near miss

- Braking on carbon rims in the wet can seem disconcerting and 'grabby'

**GIANT PROPEL
ADVANCED 2**
£1,399

91
/100

Spot on...

- Outstanding value that's unrivalled in this category
- Fast, exciting ride

Near miss

- 34/50 chainset
- Saddle a little too padded

the best racing bikes you can get for that money. For fast blasts or longer rides on UK roads the Mekk will be much less tiring to ride.

This all makes the Primo the most versatile of the two, and therefore makes it our winner. But only just.



The Mekk Primo takes the honours



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11 OF THE BEST

Bike storage solutions

Cycling can become addictive. If you find your two-wheeled habit spiralling out of control, fear not, for help is at hand. Here's 11 ways to store all those bikes that you're bound to accumulate...

Words Louise Mahé

Putting your bikes away in the shed can become like a real-life jigsaw puzzle, so finding a suitable storage method that gives your bikes some order is a good idea. This makes life simpler and keeps the garage or shed tidy as well as giving more space for other things... or just more bikes.

For those who live in a flat, or have no garage, storing your bike safely means bringing your

precious steed inside. This can take up quite a bit of space and can often be a little messy — much to the annoyance of partners or flat-mates. Again, finding a suitable storage arrangement for inside can help keep things neat and reduce the likelihood of getting carpets dirty.

Storage solutions can be simple, effective and literally just do the job of storing the bike — perfect for the garage. Those having to keep

their bike inside may wish to make more of a feature of it with some quite elaborate — but usually expensive — options out there for the house-proud pedaller.

Similarly, some stands hold more than one bike, but many question how stable these units are. We've chosen a whole host of different bike storage units and tested them to see which work best to suit different circumstances.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The stand

Bike stands hold more than one bike, usually one on top of the other making them perfect for those short of space. Some are free-standing, certain ones need to be drilled into the wall for stability, while others are telescopic, extending between the floor and ceiling. Each have certain benefits over the others and vary in exactly how many bikes they can hold. The minimum is usually two but others can hold up to four if needs be.

The hook

Possibly the most conventional method for bike storage, which holds bikes by a wheel, meaning they will be stored vertically. This is often the chosen method for garages, where you have to store multiple bikes alongside each other for easy access. Top and tailing the bikes can also help save on space, but can sometimes make them a bit trickier to put away. Some of these are specifically designed to tuck the hooks away flat, so when the bike is gone there's no hook in the way. Owners of bikes with delicate carbon rims may wish to avoid this option, however.

The shelf

This is a good storage method for those tight of space, as the shelf can be placed high on the wall out of the way. That said, placing it too high can make it somewhat of a mission to get the bikes up. Shelf-style storage units need to be drilled into the wall, so it can be a big commitment. Often designed for interiors, they are crafted to look that little bit more attractive, which helps turn your bike into more of a wall feature.





Cyclehoop Bikeshelf £66.50

The Bikeshelf is a weighty bike storage solution, meaning it must be installed on a load-bearing brick or concrete wall. Once up though, the shelf really came into its own. A number of different hooks, as well extra shelf space allows for the storage of helmets, tools and any other extras you may wish to keep by your bike.

We thought the simple steel design looked rather sleek.

The Bikeshelf is available in three different colours — white, orange and grey — none of which would look out of place in your home or garage.

A solid, wall-mounted design with extra space for kit and other riding essentials

www.cyclehoop.com
9



Cycloc Solo £59.95

This colourful bucket-style design mounts onto your wall, giving a quirky, modern look for inside the house, although some may say it's better suited to the garage. Once up we found the bike's top tube must be positioned in exactly the right place for it to balance, due to the curved design. The bucket shape means you can keep all your essential

bike bits near your steed, while two holes in the bucket mean you can lock your bike when it's hung on the stand.

A quirky, colourful design but fitting the bike into place can be a little too fiddly

8

www.cycloc.com



Mottez 2 Bike Folding Wall Mount £26.49

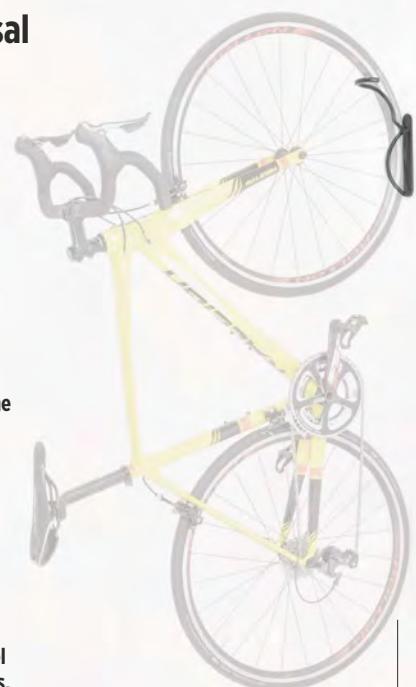
One of the less expensive storage units on test looks just that, cheap. While this wouldn't matter in the garage or shed it's not to our taste for inside the house.

The neat fold-away arms make it good for those wanting to increase space when you're out riding, but with the ability to hold two bikes this seemed somewhat wasted. The biggest

flaw with Mottez's rack was the arms were too far apart, making it awkward to place a bike on. Our 54cm frame was too small and we had to adapt how we hung it slightly.

Cheap-looking and not particularly well thought out design

www.todayscyclist.co.uk
6



Tortec Universal Storage Hook £14.99

Tortec's storage hook is the cheapest option in our test and is a simple hook design that has room for the front wheel to rest. The main issue we had with Tortec's design was that any wider-tyred bikes didn't sit comfortably in the area designed to keep the wheel in place. Similarly the rigidity of the hook prevented any side-to-side movement — not great for those tight for space or trying to squeeze multiple bikes into a small shed. An epoxy powder-coated shell protected the wheel from scratches and scuffs, but this looks likely to be rubbed off with repeated use.

7

Very cheap, but lacks the versatility and design of other storage options

www.zylo.co.uk

Gear Up OakRack Freestanding £169.99

Gear Up's offering was one of the more expensive racks we tested. Its freestanding stability and ability to hold up to four cycles made it great for indoors. That said, it's not so good for those short of space due to its large four-legged base, which prevents it from being tucked tight against a wall. Relatively easy to assemble, the sturdy hooks that hold the underneath of the bike's top tube are just the right width apart to keep them balanced and can be moved to cater sloping top tubes.



Can hold up to four bikes and is very stable but takes up quite a bit of room



www.madison.co.uk

Saris Hottie £230

With a big price tag, Saris's Hottie bikestand was a sleek-looking number that would easily fit into a modern-looking home without taking up too much room. The shorter legs at the back meant it could be pushed in closely against the wall, although because of this we were initially worried about stability. However, even with two bikes loaded on there was no worries of it falling over. The only drawback was the lack of adjustment in the arms that hold the underside of the top tube; those with sloping top tubes may struggle to achieve a good fit.

An expensive but stylish number that's perfect for those tight for indoor storage space



www.paligap.cc

Minoura Gravity Stand £109.99

This super-simple design from Minoura uses the weight of the bikes to keep the stand in place against the wall. If you don't trust this alone then there is an attachment that can be drilled into the wall to ensure its stability, but we had no issues and even when knocked the stand remained stable.

As the stand just leans against the wall it takes up little room, making it great for those with limited space. Fully adjustable hooks hold the underneath of the bike's top tube, so it should suit the vast majority of bikes and frame sizes.



This compact stand impressed with its stability making it perfect for indoors



www.zyro.co.uk



Cactus Tongue UNI £69.99

While the UNI doesn't boast the stainless steel and leather look of its more expensive stablemate, it has other features and a more reasonable price tag. Specific holes enable you to lock your bike to it, ensuring your prized steed is safe.

A white powder-coating means it looks great inside while still being weather resistant for use outside.

PVC sleeves keep your bike's paintwork protected. Bikes can be hung horizontally, or vertically by the handlebars, though we found this slightly more difficult and it took up more space.

The UNI looks good and is a fuss-free way to store a bike indoors



www.cactus-tongue.co.uk

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E-mail: sales@bike-treks.co.uk Biketreks Ltd, Rydal Road, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9AN Tel: 015394 31245



Steadyrack £65.99

Despite being the most expensive vertical hanging stand, we found it the most effective and stable. Once drilled into the wall it felt super-sturdy and the front wheel slotted into the metal supports easily with a simple push-in motion.

When not in use it folded away flat against the wall, which is handy for such a large contraption. Those short of storage space will be impressed with the Steadyrack's ability to be swung round when in use, so your steed sits flush against the wall.



Not the best looking but features an easy to use, space-saving design



www.euroraxx.com

Topeak Dual-Touch Bike Stand £139.99

The Topeak Dual-Touch works very well as a versatile, space-saving bike storage solution — so long as you have a strong ceiling to wedge the stand under. It is easy to adjust the stand height with a simple quick-release that is secured with a lever at the bottom of the stand to increase the pressure between floor and ceiling. Adjustments are easy and the mounts tilt, allowing for a number of positions by utilising extra hooks. Extending up to 520cm (or 355cm with the optional extender) and with simple rubber mounts to eliminate frame scratches, it can be placed pretty much anywhere.



A great storage solution; the only limiting factor is weak or very high ceilings



www.extrauk.co.uk

Feedback Sports Velo Hinge £25.99

Feedback Sports has taken a conventional method for bike storage — a hook — and adapted it to make it more convenient. A hinge mechanism allows the bike to be stored upright or closer to the wall depending on what works best for your space. This mechanism also allows more bikes to be fitted in next to each other — perfect for saving space in the shed. The Velo Hinge can also be folded away when not in use, making it good for those with partners or flat-mates moaning about bulky equipment taking up space when your bike is gone.



Simple yet effective method for storing bikes, with the ability to fold away when not in use



www.feedbacksports.com

VERDICT

Many of these bike storage options stood out for a variety of reasons. When looking to buy a bike storage solution, we would definitely recommend taking a little time to thoroughly assess your personal needs; is it for indoors or in the garage? Do you need to store one or more bikes and how much room do you have?

Some stands, like Gear Up's offering, are great for those with a fair few bikes, but it does take up a lot of room. If you need to store up to four bikes inside you may be better off getting two Minoura Gravity Stands. We were really impressed with the simplicity and effectiveness of Minoura's design, with the fully adjustable hooks catering for all shapes and sizes of bikes.

However, if you're looking to store just one bike indoors, we really liked both Cactus Tongue and Bikeshelf. Each looked good on the wall and were easy to use. The Bikeshelf is very heavy though, which means ensuring it's fitted to the correct type of wall can be a limiting factor.

When it came to hanging by the front wheel we were impressed by the Steadyrack, which had the ability to lean the bike against the wall to save more space than the Velo Hinge.



Iconic Cycling Events

A division of Breathless 6SDFH \$FWYWHV /WG

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Land of the Giants

CA travels to Taiwan to go behind the scenes at one of the largest bicycle factories in the world

Words and pictures: Kevin Sharpe

During a recent holiday to Taiwan riding in one of its beautiful National Parks, I was fortunate to be invited to visit the biggest company in bicycle manufacturing, on the island and possibly in the world.

The Giant factory at Taichung, Western Taiwan shouldn't be called "the Giant factory", it would be more appropriate to call it "the great, enormous Giant factory". With 6.3 million bikes produced here each year, and \$6 billion made annually, the name Giant has never been more apt.

The company's long-standing success can partly be attributed to its production process, which takes place predominantly on one site. Rather than taking delivery of off-the-shelf carbon fibre sheets that are manufactured by a third party, like many carbon frame builders do, Giant is unique in that it controls the entire frame-building process every step of the way.

Walking into reception at Giant

headquarters, the first thing you see is a large cartoon style cardboard cut-out of Giant chairman King Liu, who founded the company in 1972. Behind on the surrounding walls, are floor to ceiling-sized photographs of the cyclists who have ridden Giant bikes to success, including Marcel Kittel, Marianne Vos and Danny Hart.

Restricted access

After a short introduction and talk from the marketing team about the Giant brand, products over the past 40 years and their ideas for the future, we walk over to the factory to begin our tour. We are told in no uncertain terms photographs cannot be taken around the factory floor. As I wonder about this to myself, we pass colossal machines and I have a cheeky chuckle about which one of these they would slowly feed you into if caught taking a furtive snap or two.

We see row after row of shelves

11,405 people

Giant employs globally,
2,500 work at the
Taichung factory

The factory
has only fairly
recently opened
to the public





1st
company to
mass-produce
carbon bikes



"Up to 500 individual patches of carbon matting are used to build up the frames and junction areas"

1.8
billion
US dollars net
income in 2013

with stacks and stacks of different jigs, all meticulously labelled in Taiwanese. Which bikes could these have been the pattern for? Could they have been used on any of the bikes I've owned or ridden in the past? Giant produces 150,000 frames a year, which it says works out as 550 frames a day — that's a lot.

Our group is told not to stray over the taped out yellow and black walkways on the factory floor, which guide us safely past all the hustle and bustle, as a blur of movement — a mix of factory workers and machines — carries on besides us.

Our guide for our tour has an audio set-up with microphone held in place over the ear, and a little amplifier and speaker hanging off the side of his belt, like some sort of mobile karaoke system. It's struggling to be heard with the factory drone all around us. I'm expecting some sort of eardrum-piercing, shrill feedback, mixed with crackling noises as his audio set-up receives interference from the surrounding machines' electronics. In such a noisy place, with constant hisses, clangs, bangs and sirens, it's hard to imagine being on one of these bikes, speeding through a quiet country lane somewhere back home.

We approach a zone that is



6.3
million
bikes built
in 2013

partitioned off from all the rest of the area, and I peer through the windows at the white-aproned workers with goggles and face masks inside. This is the lay-up room. I'm told that up to 500 individual patches of carbon matting are used to build up the frames and junction areas, like the headset or bottom bracket. These patches are meticulously laid down, one layer at a time, criss-crossing the carbon sheets' directional strengths to best effect.

Our guide firmly reminds us again of the no photo policy. It is not until very recently that areas such as this have been accessible to the public, and having not been anywhere like this before — the closest I've got is watching *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* — I feel lucky to see this process in action.

Next up we see one of the jigs like the ones earlier, now being loaded up with the carbon sheets, the headset tubing, bottom bracket and seat tube, before it's off to be baked. Almost automatically a new, identical jig appears to replace the previous one, and the process is repeated again.

Market domination

I try to work out which machines and areas are responsible for the different stages of the frame building process, but there is too much going on all around, activity everywhere and constant noise. Large trolleys roll by with a worker at each end pushing and pulling their way past us, loaded with frames, top to bottom. There is murmuring from the rest of the group of journalists — speculating on what particular model these frames could be.

We're told that 40 per cent of Giant's market comes from the mountain bike sector, with the most popular model being the Giant Trance. Another 10-15 per cent goes to the road bike sector, with the Giant Propel and Escape being ➤



the highest sellers. The remaining proportion of sales break down to the cyclo-cross and hybrid sector, led by the Giant Roam.

Bicycle masterclass

Next stop on tour we watch welders at their stations skilfully, and impressively, welding on rear disc brake mounting studs to a mountain bike frame. Then suddenly music starts playing over the factory address system. All the surrounding noise of the factory dies down and relative silence takes over. It's three o'clock and that means teatime, as the majority of workers hurriedly scuttle off for a cuppa. I wonder how far these workers have to go to get to the tea station in this vast place — do they even get time to enjoy a brew in their allotted break?

Due to the unexpected silence caused by the downing of tools, the tell-tale noise of the release of a camera's shutter belonging to one of the group members is revealed. Although very quick, it is also very blatant. Immediate eye contact passes between each member of my group. I expect the industrial espionage alarm

to be ringing all over the factory, and the perpetrator to be rapidly ejected from the scene via a glass tube down from the factory roof — Willy Wonka style. No such luck, our guide just politely, but forcefully, reminds us all of the no photograph policy — again.

We move on from the scene of the crime to a new zone next door. A production line of workers as far as the eye can see is fitting components

to frames. It's now that our guide gives us permission to take pictures in this area. As soon as the sentence has left his mouth the cameras go into overdrive; flashing and clicking at everything we approach. The aproned workers don't seem bothered as they go through the motions.

A small forklift truck zooms

11,275
Giant dealers
worldwide

18 Giant stores
nationwide here
in Britain



"A forklift truck zooms past with crates of Ultegra groupsets in protective sponge"



670,000
square metres

The size of Giant's HQ
and Taiwan factory,
equivalent to 94
football pitches

Giant's bikes are
transported to shops
all over the world



Hundreds of
frames are made
each day

past, loaded with crates containing Ultegra groupsets all laid out in protective sponge, as it makes a delivery further down the line. A machine next to us continually, every few seconds deposits a wheel out with a metallic clang, as they roll down a shoot onto their next phase of assembly. Above, in the ceiling a few metres above our heads, frames gently rock in their cradles as they are transported along their way to becoming bikes.

Walking across the yard from the factory back towards the main office block, I spot a large warehouse where lorries are being loaded up with Giant branded bike boxes. Our guide looks a little nervous as the group surges over to have a look. This isn't on his structured factory tour. We peek inside the warehouse and it is vast — think of the warehouse in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

The floor to the ceiling is covered with a computerised shelving system containing bike boxes all lined up, row after row. An automated system appears to be randomly plucking boxes off and putting them onto

connecting conveyor belts.

Rather than humans, a computer is operating the system here by scanning barcodes on the sides of crates. Our guide worries that we may decipher the tiny Taiwanese text on the boxes' delivery labels, and ushers us away.

Smooth operation

We know that these bikes will be travelling across the globe to almost every corner of the planet. And we can only guess as to how many miles each one will have travelled before it reaches our local bike shop, and gets ridden by its new owner.

Our tour of the factory comes to an end and we are shuttled back to our hotels. I reflect on the vastness of the operation I have witnessed here.

According to our guide, Giant's founder King Liu named his empire after his favourite American baseball team, the San Francisco Giants. When the name was selected I doubt even he would have foreseen just how appropriate his choice would be, for a company that is now the giant of the bike industry.

550
carbon frames
made a day (road
and mtb)

FITNESS

Q&A

ASK CYCLING ACTIVE

Welcome to fitness Q&A, where our coaches and nutritionists are on hand to help you. Each month, we answer your queries, problems and dilemmas so you can enjoy your cycling worry-free. Send your questions to robert.hicks@timeinc.com

CA EXPERT



This month,
Level 3
British
Cycling
coach Rob
Mortlock
answers
your fitness
questions

Sports v real food

Q Are recovery drinks necessary after my ride or should I just eat real food?
Allan Donald, Kent

A Before we talk about the pros and cons of purpose-made recovery drinks versus 'real' food, we should mention the importance of rehydrating after exercise. You should be topping up hydration levels as you ride, but it's important to make sure you are replenishing lost fluids and electrolytes afterwards as well. If your urine is darker than straw colour after your rides then you need to drink more water.

One of the biggest advantages of recovery drinks, or powdered shakes which you mix with water, is convenience. Imagine you are an elite athlete who's just completed a round of competition, you are stuck at the velodrome or stadium with no source of real food until you get back to your hotel, but you still need to replenish your muscle glycogen stores and rehydrate before the finals in a couple of hours. This is where supplements come into their own. Many of them are also designed to maximise absorption and digestion, though not everyone finds them easy to digest.

Sports drinks are the most convenient way to refuel quickly



On the other hand, if you are a 'weekend warrior' who arrives home to a full fridge and an afternoon in front of the TV watching the match, then you would probably be better off preparing a meal consisting of a ratio of approximately 4:1 carbohydrate to protein.

If you are somewhere in-between, you can have the option of keeping some recovery drinks or powdered shakes on standby for the busy days, and eat the real food when you have more time. In any case, look to take on your recovery nutrition within 30 minutes of finishing your ride, and aim to eat a normal, balanced meal less than two hours later.

All of a tingle

Q Midway through a long ride I start experiencing pins and needles in my fingers. Do you know why, and is it dangerous?
Richard Vaughan, Cardiff

A There are several reasons why you might be experiencing pins and needles in the fingers, and they are not usually too serious. If you are only getting this on the bike, it may be that you are gripping the bars too tightly and that is causing the numbness and tingling. To alleviate this, try relaxing your grip by periodically wagging your fingers and making sure your arms and upper body are relaxed but stable; keep a slight bend in the arms and make sure the wrists are straight and not turned inwards. You see many riders with rigid straight arms and the wrists turned inwards, putting all their upper body weight on their wrists and hands — a sure-fire recipe for discomfort.

Another very common cause for pins and needles in the fingers is pressure on the nerves running to the hands at some other point along their journey. You may have heard of carpal tunnel syndrome, where the nerves in the wrist are under pressure that can be relieved with a simple operation. As nerves in the hands travel up the arms and to the neck, there could also be pressure at any point along this journey, caused either by your riding position, or a general physiological issue.

If you still have these symptoms after modifying your riding position, and ensuring you're not allowing too



Orthotic inserts can help to cure issues associated with over-pronation

much pressure to build up on the hands, you should see your GP. Conditions such as carpal tunnel or cubital tunnel are easily operable; however, persistent tingling and numbness in the fingers and hands can also be an indicator of diabetes so it does make sense to visit the doctor if your symptoms persist or get worse.

Pain in the knee

Q I've been riding my bike for five years now, but recently I've started to develop knee pain. It's on the outside of my right knee. I haven't changed my bike position and am the same weight. My training/riding hasn't ramped up either. Any reasons why? It's quite uncomfortable and takes a day or so to go down.
Steven Appleyard, Devon

A What you describe sounds like a very common cycling complaint: iliotibial band (ITB) syndrome. This relates to the connective tissue which plays a significant role in stabilising your knee while you pedal. What can happen is that the ITB can become inflamed where it is repeatedly coming into contact with bony prominences of the femur. The usual cause of this is an issue with the way your knee 'tracks' during the pedal stroke. When pedalling, your knees should remain in the vertical plane; if there is a side-to-side movement this can cause the ITB issues and knee pain that you are experiencing.

Another problem which causes pain on the outside of the knee is excessive foot pronation. This is where the foot rolls inward and

JUST RIDE

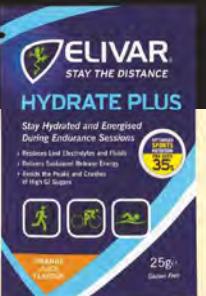


causes the knee joint to twist on the pedal stroke. In many cases this can be corrected with special inserts in your cycling shoes. As bike-fit is an adaptive process and your body changes over the months and years, adapting to exercise, you should probably seek to revisit your bike-fit annually or if at any point you begin to experience discomfort.

In a lot of cases, you don't need to have changed anything to develop a painful problem. In fact, repetition of movement alone can trigger issues with discomfort and injury. Many cyclists don't stretch the hip flexor muscles, which are shortened through cycling, and these can also cause pain and discomfort when neglected. In addition to the right stretches, a foam roller on the outside of the thigh may help. A visit to a physiotherapist for advice may be a good course of action if you are unable to correct the problem yourself.

CA recommends **Elivar Hydrate Plus**

This mini (25g) sachet makes hydration easy. You haven't got to worry about measuring out scoops into your drink bottle, just tear off the top and pour all of it in. One sachet contains 23.9g of carbohydrates plus sodium and potassium to help replace salts that may have been lost through sweating. It mixes well with water (400ml) and is refreshing too — it's also gluten-free. Pop a couple into your jersey and ride with peace of mind that you've got enough fuel and salts to comfortably get you round your ride.
www.elivar.com £12.99 for box of 12



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uvex



5 ways to increase your speed (with no extra effort)

Extra speed without having to train harder sounds like the Holy Grail — but with these simple tips, you could be riding faster on your next ride without burning an extra joule

Words Hannah Reynolds **Photos** Andy Jones

1 Pump up your tyres

How often do you check your tyre pressures? Before every ride or just every once in a while when they start to feel soft? Making sure you have the correct pressure will mean you roll along smoothly without wasting energy. Check the sidewall of your tyre for the manufacturer's recommended pressure. Overinflating your tyres is not a good idea, as they need some 'give' in order to deform and have

sufficient grip when cornering. But if you've been trundling along on underinflated tyres, pumping them up will immediately increase your speed.

2 Wear tighter clothing

Overcoming air resistance is the single biggest energy expenditure for a cyclist — anything you can do to reduce this will make you go faster for the same effort. Oversized, flapping clothes are the

biggest culprit causing poor aerodynamics, and also the easiest to fix. Jackets that allow in windflow and inflate like a parachute won't do you any favours, as they act like an air brake, slowing you down.

Think about every area of your clothing. Make sure that it is slim-fitting as well as comfortable. The new look of road aero-helmets may take a bit of getting used to but it's a style that's here to stay, so embrace it to go faster.

3 Tuck your elbows in

Even if you are dressed head-to-toe in super-sleek streamlined Lycra, if your position is poor, you will catch the air and slow yourself down. You don't need a session in a wind tunnel or any radical position changes to reduce your frontal area; simple things such as tucking in your elbows, using the drops and lowering your chest towards the bars will help.

You may not want to ride like



this all the time but if you need to speed up, or it is a particularly windy day, think about how you can tuck yourself into your bike to catch less wind.

4 Look after your bike

Clean bikes are faster. A dirty chain, stiff bottom bracket, rubbing brakes or knackered wheel bearings all waste energy — energy that could be better spent on propelling you forward. Keeping on top of your maintenance is important, not just for avoiding irritating mechanicals out on the road but for making sure everything runs sweetly. Ensuring that nothing is loose or rubbing and that your chain is not gunked up with grime will add both safety and speed.

Pro rider Giacomo Nizzolo lost his place in the front group of a cobbled Classic race this year because of a rubbing brake pad. In the post-race interview, he explained that, because of this friction — and despite pushing out massive power figures — he couldn't hold the wheels in front of him. Any moving part that rubs on something is going to create friction — don't let a lack of bike maintenance slow you down.

5 Don't over-brake

Ah yes, it may sound slightly facetious and more than a little bit obvious, but over-braking slows you down, and is a very common bad riding habit. For instance, imagine you've got to the top of a big hill. You can see the road drop away ahead; there are no corners, and after the descent it begins to flatten out. There is no need to brake at all — but you'll have to be comfortable with picking up speed, and that takes confidence.

Many riders who lack confidence tend to 'drag' their brakes — this means constantly applying them to keep the speed down, usually out of fear. In the worst-case scenario, the wheel rim heats up so much it causes the tyre to burst (a real possibility on a long descent in warm weather). More likely, the over-braking simply means you never get the full benefit of the 'free speed' gifted by gravity.

If you brake excessively before corners, you have to work extra hard to get back up to speed, which takes a lot of energy. The more smoothly you corner or descend, and the lighter you are with the brakes, the faster you will be. It's a skill worth practising.



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FITNESS

Excuse me, MAM!

Bikes in the kitchen? Obsessed with weekly mileage? It's definitely not just the MAMILs — we meet a woman who spends far more time in Lycra than her man does

Words Rebecca Charlton Photos Daniel Gould



With so much talk in the non-cycling press of middle-aged men in Lycra (MAMILS) taking over the roads of Britain, we got a bit disgruntled.

Anecdotes from cyclists' wives, moaning of their husband's weird habit of wearing a Superman-style outfit and hanging out in gangs with similarly dressed men at the local park. Not to mention the clippy-cloppy shoes. That's the kind of representation we kept seeing.

There's certainly nothing wrong with being a MAMIL or indeed a PILOC as one reader rather unkindly put it (pensioners in Lycra on cycles). But with a strong female contingent of editorial staff at *Cycling Active*, we know there are plenty of women who leave their partners at home while they enjoy a regular pedal. It certainly works both ways. Some spouses and partners even ride together — shock horror.

So, next came the task of coming up with an acronym that perfectly defines the female equivalent of the MAMIL. How about a SLICK (speedy lady in cycling kit), perhaps? A WILOW (woman in Lycra on wheels)? We gave up trying. Answers on a postcard, please.

Tim and Jen's story: "It's all about teamwork"

Tim Day, 38, accepts that his wife, fitness instructor Jen, 39, is the serious bike rider in the relationship. I meet them both at their family home in St Albans, and they tell me about their working lives. With a busy career in the renewable energy industry for Tim, and Jen's time spent running her studio iPilates, life isn't exactly quiet. But when you add in their two children, Jack, 12, Olly, 14 and a passion for endurance cycling, their calendars look pretty hectic. Oh, and they have two dogs too.

Jen is serious about her bike riding, and makes time to fit in a significant amount of miles each week, admitting early on in our meeting that she would keep her pride and joy in the bedroom if she could. Tim describes himself as a fair-weather rider and understands how important it is for Jen to get out training. He always has a cup of tea waiting when she returns from a ride.

Right now, Jen is sipping a healthy-looking green smoothie, having just finished a pilates session.

"Did Tim have this one waiting?" we ask. "No," says Tim sheepishly, "I don't necessarily prepare the recovery stuff because I always get it wrong!"

Despite having a busy work-life himself, Tim appreciates that Jen has little energy left when she gets in, so he helps as much as possible with the household chores. "It's all about teamwork," he says.

Jen chimes in in Tim's defence, "I usually teach on a Monday evening, and last week I came home and Tim had done the boys' tea. In fact, he'd done the ironing as well; there was food ready for me, Jack was doing his homework, Olly was sorted out, the whole thing was just running smoothly. He's incredible."

Adjusting his halo, Tim beams, "I had been to work too and taken them to football."

Are they really the perfect couple? If so, we want to know how they manage such a harmonious balance.

"It's hard to fit in the training, with the kids and everything else," continues Jen. "I founded iPilates in 2011 and that's grown nicely but it's about finding that balance. I love it, though; if you want it you make it work."

"Sometimes I come back from riding, so tired I can't even get undressed. Last weekend I had an awful ride on Saturday; it was really cold and I had so many layers on that I couldn't even move. When I got home, Tim was trying to help me get my shoes off. It's really selfish in a way; I try not to let anything else slip but it's my time and so I get out and do it."

"I've beaten myself up about it in the past but I think, as long as every base is covered, I'm alright. It's a complete relief knowing Tim's there; it's a case of having four hands instead of two," says Jen.

"It's a team effort," adds Tim. "There are four of us, plus the dogs, and we're a team. All of my sporting

background, with rugby, etcetera, is all team-based, and if I'm coaching kids or away on a rugby tour, Jen picks up the slack. When it's her time to train [the responsibility] switches."

Jen adds a caveat: "If you're not careful, it can become a bit of a competition as to who's the most tired. So it's best to not mention the tired word too often!"

"It's the little things that make a difference. If I come home and things are everywhere and the washing hasn't been done, it can be a tipping point. If you come back from an 80km ride and the bin's overflowing, it should be



Sweaty Betty

Jen Day is a Sweaty Betty ambassador and is part of the Get Fit for Free initiative. "I get groups of women together and train them for free; it's all community-based." Find out more on her website at: www.i-pilates.co.uk

"I'm all for equality — there's no reason why women shouldn't be the ones cycling. It's so accessible as a sport"



no big deal, but when you're exhausted, you can have a meltdown."

Bitten by the cycling bug

It was six years ago that Jen fell head over heels in love with cycling. "I hadn't been on a bike since my red poppy frame when I was nine years old," she says. "I was a runner and someone asked me to do a triathlon, so, aged 35, I learnt to swim, then I got a rubbish hybrid bike.

"I then went to Vietnam with a girlfriend, cycled 800km in northern Vietnam, and got the bug. So I got back, got a road bike, did London to Paris and never looked back. I'm now doing a half-Ironman this year," adds Jen with a slightly worried expression.

We ask Tim if he feels pushed out by Jen's new passion. "Well, I bought [the bike] for her and I own it, it's mine, so it's my fault," he laughs.

"When we got the new bike for her, she told me, 'I've got a new love of my life.'"

So what else does Tim have to put up with? "Kit everywhere, always," he replies. "Jen has a spare room upstairs where she lays out all of her kit for the next day of training. There's always stuff everywhere."

Nodding in agreement, Jen adds, "I always have snacks with me too; there's always food around, nuts in my bag, car, everywhere."

Tim's view

"In the summer I'll ride much more socially, and also it's outside of rugby season, so I'm very proud of Jen for the dedication she puts in; she's amazing and I totally understand the support she needs. If I can persuade Jen to come out for a social cycle that doesn't involve hammering me all the way round, and possibly a stop for lunch, we'll do that together. That's my sort of ride."



MAMILS

We ask Jen what she makes of all the MAMIL references in cycling. "I'm all for equality; there's no reason why women shouldn't be the ones cycling. It's so accessible as a sport, and from the very beginners right up to an advanced level, you can just go and do it."

"I think the men should take up a bit of the slack at home, if I'm honest. I work, Tim has a full career... it should be a 50/50 split to juggle everything else."

Although he jokes about it at first, Tim loves the message they're able to send out to the kids. "Jen loves nothing more than overtaking a MAMIL, and, let's be honest, especially if that MAMIL is me. Seriously, though, for the kids, being in the house in this environment, it's brilliant; they see their mum as this super-fit woman and they see me trying to keep up with her. What a great role model."

The boys have been going along to support mum at events since they were little and have grown up around her doing sport. "I'm having a go at the Provence half-IronMan," Jen continues. "For them to see their mum doing that is a good thing for them to grow up with. It gives them a competitive edge too. I'd quite like them to have the drive to know they can do anything."

"Olly, who's the eldest, is just getting into cycling on a Trek bike; Jack isn't yet. Olly's really quick, actually. He'll do six miles to school and back every day, so that gives him a really good base."

"I'll take him out at the weekends and we can do 30 to 40km easily together. He's been doing that since he was 13 — it gives him so much fitness."

This Girl Can

"It's important for me to inspire the children, and other women too, to get out and do it. When I go along to the women-only events, it's such a nice environment; you are so empowered by these women who are like me, in their forties [actually, Jen turns 40 this year].

"I love events like Cycletta, where it's women-only. I just literally rock up on my own and do it, and often you meet lots of people you know there. I tend to do a lot of cycling on my own because the [iPilates] studio means that my free time might be at times when not a lot of clubs would have a ride going out. So I struggle with that."

"I ride with The Hub, Redbourne cycle club, when I can, which is brilliant and I have a few girl friends that cycle a lot too but I also do a lot of solo riding," says Jen.

Making reference to the Sport England This Girl Can advertising campaign, launching this year, we ask Jen's thoughts on the impact she thinks it will have on young girls getting into the sport.

"I think the impact is going to be huge," she replies. "I think it will take time to change the mindset of women on some of the barriers because it starts at school-age when you're doing PE and you just want to get out of it. You don't want to have to wash your hair because you'll look rubbish [afterwards].

"If girls could just know how good it is to have that adrenaline and those natural endorphins in your body, you don't care about your hair. You feel so good, and if you do it regularly, that kick you get surpasses any bit of make-up or hair dye you could possibly ever want."

"I love nothing more than fashion and clothing, but to go out and not care in the mornings, with no make-up, is brilliant. Then it feels lovely when you have an occasion to put your make-up on with a nice dress."

"If you train hard, you've got an appetite for life and for food — you can eat well, you can nourish yourself, you can have little treats. For me, it's all about being healthy, having a balance and looking after yourself from the inside first. The outside stuff can come later." **End**

Jen and Tim's relationship is built on the solid foundation of absolute equality



This Girl Can

Find out more about the work of Sport England and the This Girl Can campaign at: www.thisgirlcan.co.uk



"Last summer we went out and it was the first ride I'd been on in ages. I had no fitness whatsoever, and we went out and we'd done around 50km and Jen decided we'd just add a 'little loop' on — it was at least another 30km and I had a total meltdown, I was absolutely knackered! Jen forgets that she's super-duper fit with a big engine. I was bonking, I was in all sorts of trouble."

"It's important for me to inspire the children, and other women too, to get out and do it. When I go along to the women-only events, it's such a nice environment; you are so empowered by these women who are like me."

FITNESS

SIMPLY THE BEST

Caffeinated energy gels

When concentration is starting to wane or your mind is starting to wander — particularly on a long ride — a caffeine gel can be just the solution to zap you back into action

Words Robert Hicks

There are energy gels and then there are those with caffeine in them, designed not only to give your muscles a boost but your mind too.

Whether you're heading out for an all-day ride or just a quick hour's blast after work, it's important that your muscles are adequately fuelled to prevent the body from tiring. However, a lot of cyclists fail to take in to consideration mental fatigue, which can have an effect on your cycling.

We've all been on the bike when our bodies

are feeling great, but our concentration levels are just not quite sharp enough — it usually takes a minor 'scare' to wake us up out of our slumber.

Caffeine is a stimulant. It helps stimulate the central nervous system, heart rate and respiration. It can also help improve mood. While many people believe it acts as a diuretic — substances that make you wee more — there isn't a great deal of research to back this up.

Will it make me faster?

Well, maybe yes. Without getting too technical,

when we consume caffeine, certain nerve responses speed up, causing blood vessels to constrict and motor neurons to fire from the brain.

Our body feels like it's working, and so produces adrenaline, causing our heart rate and breathing rate to increase, and our liver releases more sugar into the bloodstream.

Numerous studies have shown that consuming caffeine both before and during cycling can improve performance, decreasing time to fatigue and increasing speed and power.



NEED TO KNOW

How much

Doses of 3mg/kg of body weight are effective, regardless of format (coffee, tablet, powder, gum, gels, energy drinks).

When

Research is still ongoing, but it is thought that caffeine shouldn't be taken too long before riding. Caffeine does take a few hours to be broken down.

Dangers

Too much caffeine can be dangerous and cause the jitters. Another possible side effect of too much caffeine consumption is stomach upsets.

OTE Caffeine Gel £1.80

OTE (On The Edge) wanted to create the best tasting caffeine gel and it seems to be on to a winner. Its pineapple gel is made using natural flavours, contains real fruit juices as well as electrolytes to help combat dehydration. Each gel — which is extremely thin in consistency — contains 50mg of caffeine, which is naturally

occurring from the ingredient guarana, and has 20.5g of carbohydrates, so it will give you an energy boost too.

Light on the stomach, full of carbohydrates and caffeine

www.otesports.co.uk



SiS Go+ Caffeine £1.79

We really like this gel at CA, mainly due to its taste and consistency. Unlike some, it's light on the stomach, so much so that it doesn't need to be consumed with water. Each 60ml gel contains 75mg of caffeine and 21g of carbohydrates. SiS does make another caffeinated gel, which contains 150mg of caffeine, but for us this one works

perfectly well, reenergising muscles and boosting mental alertness.

Tastes good, light on the stomach and gives your body a kick

www.sciencessinsport.com



Zipvit 7C Caffeine Energy Gel £1.69

Zipvit isn't messing about with this smooth espresso gel. Even when you hold it, it feels thick and heavy. And it's not surprising when you realise what's in each gel. One 60ml sachet — which uses no artificial flavours, colours or preservatives — contains 51g of fast digesting carbohydrates and a whopping 160mg of caffeine. To put that into context, a can of Red Bull only

has 80mg of caffeine. If you are going to use this gel, only take one before or during your ride. You won't need another.

May be too strong for some, but if it's caffeine you want, then look no further

www.zipvitsport.co.uk



PowerGel Hydro Max £1.59

Like SiS, the PowerGel HydroMax needs no extra water in order to be consumed. In fact, if anything it's a little too thin in consistency, wobbling around as you try and open it. Having said that, it does the job. Each gel contains 100mg of caffeine, 25.5g of carbohydrates and 302mg of sodium, to help rehydration.

It's quite large too — at 67ml, it's by far the biggest on test.

Big, bulky and somewhat flimsy. Still, it's everything you want from a caffeinated gel

www.powerbar.com



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Items shown: Trofeo gents jersey RRP £50 Layla ladies jersey RRP £50

www.lusso.raleigh.co.uk



Etixx Performance Triple Action Energy Gel £1.45

Etixx only launched in the UK in September 2014, but it has been making rather large inroads across Europe over the past five years. The Triple Action Energy Gel contains 30g of carbohydrates and 35mg of caffeine. It's not a hugely caffeinated gel, but it does come from natural sources and uses a number of natural ingredients. The red fruits flavour is quite strong and

leaves a slight aftertaste in the mouth, so it's best to wash it down with some water.

While it's high in carbohydrates, as a caffeinated gel it doesn't quite make the grade. Still, not bad

www.etixxsports.com



Wiggle Nutrition Caffeine Gel £10.99 for box of 20

As one of the smallest gels on test at just 38g, it's understandable that this won't have the same punch as some of the others. Each sachet contains 22.6g of carbohydrates and 30mg of caffeine. While it will help stimulate the nervous system, it won't have the same effect as some of its rivals. However,

sometimes a little pick-me-up is all that's needed. The citrus flavour doesn't taste too bad and can be consumed within a matter of seconds.

Small, light and easy to consume but fails to hit hard

www.wiggle.com



Clif Bar Shot Gel £1.26

This gel is designed to give you a sudden lift when your energy starts to drop and your mind begins to wander. Each shot, which is just 34g, provides 24g of carbohydrates and 55mg of caffeine — so don't let its size deceive you.

You're not supposed to sip on this gel, the idea is to get it down in one, but it's a tad tricky as it's rather on the thick

side. Still, the taste is pleasant — it just feels as if you're chewing on it rather than drinking it, so you will need to take water with it.

A powerful, yet somewhat thick energy shot

7

www.clifbar.co.uk



VERDICT

While none of the caffeinated gels on test tastes horrible, it can be hard to find a great tasting one. However, we seem to have stumbled across one that not only tastes good, but also contains an abundance of carbohydrates, as well as salts to help hydration. The OTE Caffeine Gel is thin, light on the stomach, full of what we're after and pleases the palate. Perfect. Oh and if that wasn't enough, it has some fancy packaging that, depending on your tear, lets you either sip or gulp.





Making the jump



Pondering the big one?
Start training today!

Want to graduate from 60-mile rides to 100-milers? We show you how to do it

Words Rob Mortlock **Photos** Daniel Gould, Jesse Wild

There comes a time for most road riders, however serious, where you focus on the 100-mile (160.93km) target. This can be in the shape of a sportive, club ride or a personal challenge, alone or with a group.

For some, 100 miles is no big deal, just something they do every Sunday. For others it can be the single biggest physical challenge they will ever undertake on a bike. Many cyclists, however, fall

somewhere between the two and may already be comfortable with 50-60 mile rides but are eyeing the triple-figured milestone for their next achievement.

Just how big is the jump from 60 to 100 miles? How will you know if it'll be a cakewalk or a frustrating gravel ending in a miserable train journey back home?

Let's take a look at the factors that come into play with the extended mileage and see how best



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to prepare for 100 miles so you can undertake that distance with a realistic chance of it being an enjoyable and achievable target.

We've split it up into five sections, which we think need to be nailed in order to smash the 100-mile barrier. So let's start with the biggie: training.

1 Train! The physical aspect of training is usually the most common focus for people with a new goal or challenge, and many folks will think that riding as much as possible in the two weeks leading up to the big ride is sufficient. This isn't the best approach though, and what we need to do is 'train smarter'.

This doesn't mean we are striving for marginal gains like the GB squad; it means that we should be looking to maximise our training so that we are doing the right things at the right times.

If you are regularly riding 50-60 miles then that is already a great start; you could probably

get through a century ride without too much bother, although you could be far better prepared if you have gradually increased your riding time and distance on your training rides.

Remember, to do the 100, you don't need to be training by doing 100 miles all the time — 75-80 per cent is ample preparation without adding excessive volume.

Your physical training should take into account the following points:

■ Specificity: Is your 100-mile ride going to be hilly? Then ride hills on your 60-milers! Some riders really struggle on the climbs. If you are one of them then make sure you are addressing them in your training. In many cases, 100 flat miles can seem very easy and very different when compared to a hilly 60 or 70.

■ Saddle time: Try and focus more on the time in the saddle

Been there, done that

We asked *Cycling Active* readers for their advice on how to conquer the 100.

Natalie Appleyard:

Make sure your body is physically capable of spending at least six hours on the bike.

Steve Dunn:

Eat, eat, eat!

Liam Duff: Comfort is a massive thing. If you aren't comfortable on the bike, you won't hit 100.

Nigel Gilmour: Train for it. You don't have to nail 100 miles in your training, but if you can get to 70-80 miles, then you should be able to get round. Oh, and enjoy it.

Amanda Smith: Get in the right frame of mind and accept that you will be on the saddle all day.

without stopping, rather than miles covered on your training rides. Try riding at a lower intensity and see if you can stick it out for longer. If your average speed over three hours is 15mph, do you think you can hold it for over six hours? If you can comfortably ride your bike for 4-4.5 hours, then you are in a good place to think about the century.

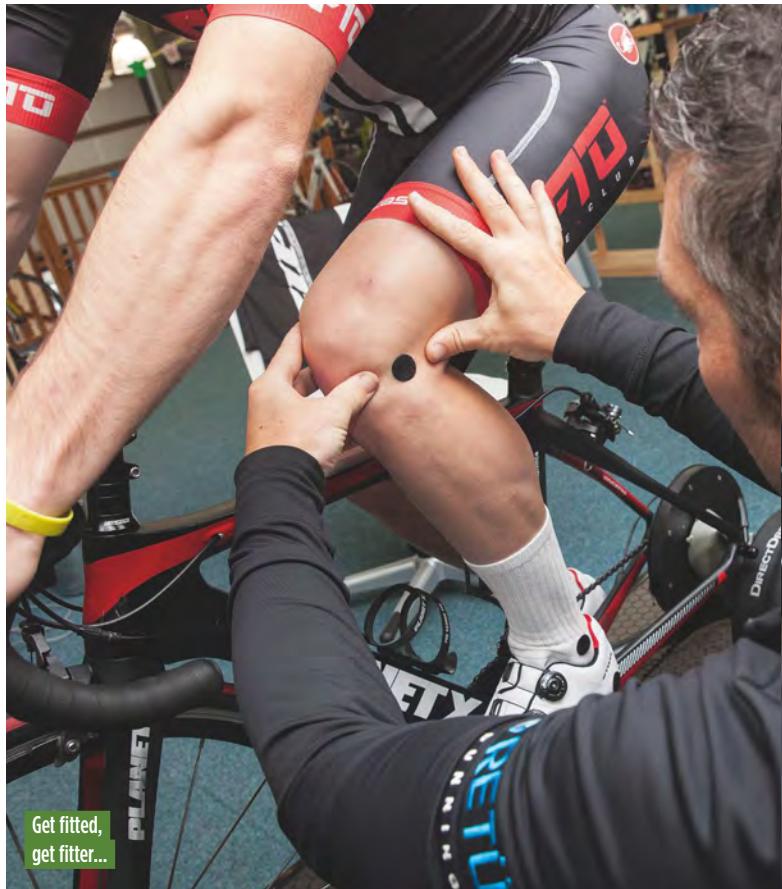
■ Rest: This is so important. Include active recovery in your training weeks and make sure you are resting properly. Keep the legs turning in the week leading up to the big ride, but don't do anything that will make you excessively tired.

2 Effort levels Whether you are riding an individual pursuit over 4km or a whole Grand Tour,

pacing your effort will be of maximum importance.

For 100 miles, you will want to make sure you don't use up all your energy too early and struggle badly in the last third of the ride. You can use a simple speedometer to gauge an average speed which you know you are comfortable with, or a heart rate monitor to keep around a particular BPM, or even old-fashioned perceived exertion — simply going by feel.

However you pace yourself, it's a good idea to also have a psychological pacing strategy, such as waypoints you think you should be at during particular times. For example: "I should be at the sharp climb at 40 miles in 150 minutes." You can adjust your effort to ensure that you avoid blowing up too early, but that you also aren't dawdling unnecessarily and missing out on a faster time.



3 Getting in the zone

We all know how powerful the mind can be, and how it can affect performance both positively and negatively. If you are riding 100 miles alone, the mind can be a helpful ally, or a destructive pest. We want to enjoy our ride, so learning during training how to disassociate ourselves from feelings of discomfort is a useful skill.

Try to focus on other things, like the scenery, your pedalling technique, or holding an aerodynamic position. The small 'process goals' of each waypoint within your pacing strategy will also help to break down the ride in your head into more manageable sections.

Remember, no matter how demoralising the weather, the hills or the headwinds might be, think about how amazing you will feel at the end of the ride, and always look ahead, up the road to where things will be changing.

4 Fuelling

How you approach your nutrition both before and during the ride can be the difference between a great performance and a trip to A&E.

How you refuel afterwards can also be a factor, which will have a huge influence on your general health and your future riding plans.

Nutrition tips

■ Before: The day before your 100-miler needs to be seriously considered — this is where the ride actually starts. You may have heard of 'carb loading' but the simplest advice here is to make sure you take on a healthy, balanced meal with fresh vegetables and low glycaemic index carbs. It's also worth considering a bowl of cereal two hours before bed as a booster.

Leave off the alcohol or fizzy pop, and drink plenty of water. In the morning, go for the cereal and fruit, and drink at least 500ml of water before you set out.

■ During: Avoid taking on a whole bunch of energy gels; these are mostly designed to help riders through the last few demanding kilometres of a road race.

You might want to take along something with caffeine and sugar just in case, but don't be tempted to break into this unless you are getting really fatigued and have already covered a good distance. All you really need is adequate carbohydrate to fuel from. An average sized cereal bar of about 30 grams for every 45-60 minutes of riding is ideal. Take along some bananas too.

Don't forget to keep eating! A critical stumbling point for many riders is the inability to fuel while riding, so make sure you are able to



take a drink from a bottle whenever you need to.

When drinking, tilt the bottle up and to the side to avoid tilting your head (so you can still look where you're going) and keep your food to hand in jersey pockets. You will need around 500ml of water per hour (more if it's very hot and you are losing it through sweat). And to help replenish the lost minerals, your second bottle should contain a small amount of an additive which contains electrolytes. Go for the powders that are aimed at hydration rather than energy. Don't try anything

you haven't already used and are happy with — the big ride isn't the one for experimenting with nutrition and hydration.

■ **After:** Your muscles need glycogen now, so this is the time for fruit juice or a purpose made recovery shake. Get those sugars in within 20 minutes — even 'bad' sugars like fizzy drinks and sweets (in moderation) can help at this point. Remember to keep hydrating and sit down to a decent meal containing some good protein within about an hour.

5 Bike fit When you are on the bike for several hours, little imperfections in position or fit can evolve into very major issues. If you have any niggles or particular localised discomfort during your normal rides, then it pays to get these seen to before the century ride.

A professional bike-fit can improve comfort and performance, while reducing fatigue and the risk of injury. It's not just how the bike fits you though — how you fit yourself to the bike also matters.

What we are talking about here is your ability to hold your position, your pedalling efficiency and flexibility.

Check out the pros with their slightly bent elbows and stable upper body, their flat backs and aerodynamic positions. OK, you might not be able to emulate them immediately, but you will probably be able to improve your current position with a few tweaks and off-bike exercises and stretches.

Get advice from a physio if needed, and make sure that you don't attempt the big ride without properly testing new positions or bike parts beforehand.

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Paris club run

What better way to experience French cycling culture than by joining a Parisian chaingang for a winter training ride?

Words and photos Sam Keir

In the Bois de Vincennes, a park in Paris's south-eastern corner, lies the Vélodrome de Jacques Anquetil. At 120 years old, its concrete track constantly exposed to the elements, paint peeling off the wooden benches that populate its empty stands, the stadium has seen better days. The high point of the velodrome's existence came when it hosted the finish lines of the 1968-74 Tours de France, five of which were won by the legendary Eddy Merckx.

Fast forward to the present day, and instead of the greatest cyclist of all time, it was me turning up on a bike — a suitable illustration of the venue's decline in fortunes over the past 40 years, perhaps. I was joining the Paris Cycliste Olympique (PCO) cycling club, who use the velodrome as their headquarters and the starting point of their Sunday-morning training rides, to experience a typical Parisian club run.

Cold comfort

After a week of unseasonably warm weather, I had been caught out by a bitterly cold winter's morning. Kitted out in bibshorts and fingerless gloves, my arrival prompted some dubious looks from the group of Frenchmen leaning insouciantly against their carbon-framed race bikes and clad in full winter gear. Club president Christian Masola introduced me to the assembled riders who, with only the faintest trace of raised eyebrows, offered me a warm welcome.

Before setting off, Christian gave us

**"Moving through the gears
I was up out of the saddle trying to
catch the group up — these guys
weren't messing around"**



a quick briefing. This included the piece of information I had been anxiously awaiting... how long the ride would be. Ever since Christian had mentioned during our email exchanges that PCO had been the club of Jeannie Longo, an Olympic gold medallist and 13-time world champion, I had been preparing





at least found something of a rhythm, which, combined with shamelessly avoiding my turn at the front of the group, allowed me to just about keep pace without heading too far into the red.

The kilometres ticked by but the suburban setting remained unchanged, mist-shrouded retail parks and concrete housing developments blending in with the grey skies. Spectacular scenery was evidently not a priority, the focus being maintaining fitness in the off-season and developing the road craft that would be put into use once the racing calendar started.

With little of interest to look at beyond advertising hoardings for local hypermarkets, I took the chance to find out a bit more about the club and its members.

Arthur, a Frenchman who, helpfully for me, spoke perfect English having spent the early part of his life in London, joined PCO for the 2014 season. Like so many people, Arthur rediscovered a love of cycling when he started using a bike as a way of getting around town quickly and cheaply. Soon hooked, Arthur decided to get into the sporting side of cycling, bought himself a road bike, joined the club and started racing. Everyone at the club raced and trained hard for it, he told me, which dashed my hopes of a cafe stop.

The group contained members of all ages, with a number of fathers being joined by their sons. It seemed likely that it was these enthusiastic juniors who were the ones pushing their dads onto their bikes, rather than the other way round. Nonetheless, it was clear that, despite their pained expressions, the older generation were thoroughly enjoying the chance to prolong, or rekindle, a love affair with their bikes.

In his mid-sixties, Christian was the oldest present but was putting to shame at least one other significantly younger rider! As we rode side-by-side, his breathing dishearteningly untroubled, he told me the history of the club. PCO had been the product of the merger of four of the city's cycling clubs, which with dwindling member numbers had decided to join forces for the 1991 season.



up. These guys weren't messing around, as a glance at my heart-rate monitor confirmed.

Holding on

As we left Paris, we crossed the Marne river, which, near the beginning of its course, is flanked by the vineyards where the Champagne enjoyed by Tour de France stage winners is produced. This was about my only connection with the cycling greats at this point, but I had by now

myself for being well and truly out of my depth. Finding out that we would be covering around 60km provided some solace in knowing that my humiliation would at least be relatively short-lived.

I was equally relieved to discover I would be joining Christian in the group of what he termed 'intermediate' riders, leaving the elite group to shoot off down the road ahead of us. Soon after, and with a cry of "*allons-y!*" we were off.

I have been used to gentle starts to group riding back in the UK, chatting with friends, slowly warming up the legs and, more often than not, blowing away the cobwebs accumulated the night before. Old habits die hard, and so I worked through my usual routine of a couple of attempts to clip in to my pedals, a change down into the inner ring to let the legs spin freely and a fiddle with my Garmin. All that completed, I lifted my eyes from my handlebars to discover that an empty stretch of tarmac had already opened up between me and the rest of the group, forcing me up through the gears and out of the saddle to catch

Top: A mist mottled boulevard signifies a successful escape from the big city

Above: The front runners toil out an arduous pace

Left: "*Allons-y!*"
PCO convene at the start of their winter training ride

"I drafted behind the club's support vehicle as it led me back to the group — I'd never felt so professional!"

PCO is now the only dedicated cycling club in Paris, but with healthy membership numbers and a burgeoning youth section, ambitions are high. Parallels between the club's fortunes and those of the French professional scene were clear, and a number of junior riders told me that they had been inspired by the success of French riders in this year's Tour de France.

Green spaces

At around 20km into the ride, we did reach something resembling the countryside as we followed a loop around the parks that encircle the commune of Bussy-Saint-Georges. Here the roads were full of groups of cyclists, taking advantage of green spaces within relatively easy reach of the nearby metropolis. Apparently, we passed two picturesque châteaux, although the lingering mist ensured I had been none the wiser.

Having taken advantage of the more pleasant surroundings to dismount and take some photos of PCO in action, I found myself with the daunting task of catching up. Mercifully, the driver of the club's support vehicle (did I mention that these guys take things pretty seriously?) allowed me to draft behind as he led me back up to the group. I've never felt so professional; I was half expecting a race commissaire to pull alongside on a motorbike and rip an imaginary dossard from my jersey.

Back in reality and back in the pack, I resumed my struggle to maintain



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pace and formation. I even took a turn on the front that, however fleeting, allowed me to say I had done my bit. Soon after, we rejoined the roads that had led us out of the city and retraced our route back to Paris. There was no



Top: The tempo continues its brisk trend

Above: Club HQ and former Tour de France finishing venue

Left: Camaraderie remained high after the ride

easing of the pace as we neared our destination, with PCO's riders intent on deriving maximum advantage from their winter training come next season.

Arriving back at the velodrome, and with this in mind, I decided against suggesting a post-ride pressie. Instead, it was over sips from our bidons that I thanked everyone for the ride and promised to join them again as soon as I had recovered. Rolling away, I waited until I was out of sight before finally allowing myself the relief of a low gear for the journey home. **End**

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CA STAFFER CHALLENGE

TRAINING TRIBULATIONS

With just four months to go until her toughest two-wheeled test to date, Jocelyn's been hitting the Wattbike, building the mileage and preparing for an intensive week of training in Majorca

Only four months to go until my challenge and I've not long started training. A chest infection kept me off the bike over winter and the turbo-trainer I bought, to combat the lack of road action, sat gathering dust.

The results of last month's fitness assessment were a wake-up call. With minimal endurance, I've relied on my strength to get me around UK sportives, but then I've never done anything over 60 miles. This tactic isn't going to cut it in the Alps.

So a few weeks ago I started regular Wattbike classes. I'd read how effective these high-intensity sessions can be at boosting aerobic performance. Perfect. I can stay inside, keep warm, and still reap the benefits of a road ride.

I'd arranged to meet up with Level 3 British Cycling coach, Rob Mortlock, to talk about the next steps. "You're right to a point, that high intensity and hard efforts on the Wattbike can build cardiovascular fitness, but it's also a little misleading," he says.

"While your cardiovascular fitness is important it's not just about that. Your connective tissue, ligaments and joints need to have a similar volume of fitness and be working well. That comes from handling your bike on the road. You need to build up the amount of time you're sitting on a bike. Going from one hour on a Wattbike to several on the road is where, potentially, you'll have an injury," he added.

Thankfully with the weather improving and days getting longer it's becoming much easier to get out. All I can think about is the amount of climbing (over 4,000 metres!) I need to undertake. Even in London I've found a few good climbs for hill repeats.

I also managed to go to Exmoor. I rode there last summer and remember there were some great long alpine-like climbs.

Jocelyn Mack**AGE:** 33**WEIGHT:** 10st**JOB:** Professional dancer and part-time writer for Time Inc's cycling titles
YEARS CYCLING:

Two

BIKE: Boardman Comp Fi**LIVES:** South-East London**GOAL:** To get fit enough to ride the 142km Etape du Tour this July**CA EXPERT**

Level 3 British Cycling coach
Rob Mortlock

"If you're looking to build endurance" Rob told me, "You should be doing low intensity high volume riding. The sweet spot of aerobic endurance is in Zone 2 [65 per cent of max heart rate]."

"Ideally this is something you should have been building throughout winter; those all-important base miles."

So not only am I three months behind on my training but I've been so caught up with the climbing involved that I thought I should be doing only hilly rides.

"You need to build a strong foundation of fitness before adding on top," Rob explained. "There's no point having the strength to get over a mountain if you have to abandon because you don't have the aerobic capacity to do the miles."

So what's the best way to go about this? Should I leave off the hills for now?

"You want these rides to be as flat as possible because every time you hit a hill you'll raise your heart rate above Zone 2," Rob explained.

"You want to be looking at doing a number of two-hour rides in a week. Don't head out straight away and do eight hours riding in one week, gradually build it up. And when you are able to, then three to four-hour rides. Building up to two of those a week would be ideal."

"The hills come later!"

Key points for endurance rides

- Flat rides maintaining Zone 2. Quicker than recovery pace but you should still be able to hold a conversation.
- Value high volume over high intensity.
- Build up gradually. Start with a two-hour ride if possible and aim to do this twice each week. Add a third in when you can. Ideally you should try to build up until you can ride for four or five hours twice a week.



Training for hills

If you are training for a mountainous event, it can be tough to find the right terrain in the UK. I've had a lot of useful pointers from people and heading off on a training camp seems to be the most popular bit of advice.

I've chosen Legro's Training Camp: a week-long camp on the Balearic island of Majorca. It runs during April and May and has groups that cater for all abilities from the leisure cyclist to the experienced club rider.

I'm looking forward to benefiting from structured training rides, learning more about

nutrition and simply having expert advice on hand all week.

I felt apprehensive at first, but I've been assured by friends who've attended that not only do people work hard, they play hard too. And there are masseurs to soothe aching legs! www.legrossportivetrainingcamp.com

Upper-leg therapy

The research is clear; massage therapy enhances cycling performance. But you needn't spend cash on getting rubbed down. You can do it yourself.

Words: Robert Hicks

Everyone loves a good massage. Not only does it feel great but it can also help to ease aching muscles, reduce inflammation and, according to various studies, have a positive impact on your performance.

One study conducted by researchers from McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, studied the cellular effects of exercise and the differences between those who underwent massages after exercise and those who didn't.

Results showed that massage therapy reduced exercise-related inflammation (a by-product of heavy exercise such as an all-day ride) and also helped cells recover far quicker.

Other studies show similar results. One published in June of 2014 examined how effective massage was immediately after

exercise — a time when we use massage most. The results, which were published in the *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, stated that after four days, muscles that had received immediate massage had recovered almost 60 per cent of their lost strength compared with 30 per cent for delayed-massage muscles (48 hours after) and 14 per cent for non-massaged muscles.

Clearing the dull ache

After a long ride, legs can start to feel heavy and begin to ache — a feeling we are all familiar with. This is due to a build-up of acidity in the muscles.

It was thought that massage therapy could help with the removal of these waste products, but this has been largely disproven.

But the bottom line is that massage can help muscles recover more quickly after exercise and a muscle that can shake off its soreness and regain its strength quicker, enabling you to get back on the bike sooner, can only be a good thing.

DIY

Due to the price of some massage sessions, it's still seen by many as a luxury. However, with the emergence of more classes and clinics, prices are slowly dropping and massage is becoming more affordable.

If you are still not prepared just yet to part with your money, you'll be glad to know there are techniques that will enable you to get some of the benefits of massage, in the comfort of your own home, by doing it yourself.

Try these massages on one leg at a time. If areas are particularly sore, go back and work on them, before switching.



Gliding

■ Glide the palm of your hands from your knees to your glutes, while encircling the leg. This will warm them up.



Quads

- Keep a relaxed leg and press your elbows into your quads in a straight line, from your knee to your groin.
- Repeat this on a new line until the entire quad has been worked on.
- Go deeper by applying more pressure and 'rolling' your elbow.



IT band

Many cyclists suffer from tight IT bands.

- Sit partly cross-legged. Use both hands with the heel of one palm pressing into your IT band while the other presses into your inner thigh.
- Work from your knee up to your thigh. Use your knuckles to go deeper.



Adductors (inner thigh)

- Sit in the same position as when working on your IT band, but this time grip the outside of your knee with your hand, and press your elbow into your inner thigh.



Hamstrings

- Sit at the end of the chair with your legs at a 45° angle. Press the fingers of each hand into your hamstrings. Keep your leg relaxed.



Gliding and drumming

- Just like the first step, glide your hands over your whole upper leg.
- Follow this by drumming away on each and every part you work on. Lightly tap away using your knuckles as drumsticks.



Foam rollers

A foam roller is a great tool for improving recovery after riding. They can be used for breaking down specific muscle adhesions, soothing tight muscles and also to help aid blood flow and circulation to the muscles, in a similar way to deep tissue massages.

A few thoughts on...



Tom Isitt has survived 45 years on two wheels, including a 12-year stint as a motorcycle journalist and a (very) brief spell as a messenger in London. He doesn't profess to be an advanced rider or an expert; he just happens to have a wealth of experience and an ability to think about the mechanics of riding in an analytical way.

Climbing and descending

Tom Isitt prescribes some climbing and descending skills that, once mastered, will make you a faster and safer rider whether you're going up or down

Words Tom Isitt Photos Jesse Wild

Cyclists love hills and mountains. To the average man in the street, our predilection for riding up and down hills is unfathomable, but it's something that most of us enjoy. It's a challenge, and the reward for our efforts is 'free speed' on the way down.

As with most things we do on our bikes, there are ways of doing it faster and better — using our brains as well as our bodies. Yes, an epic lactate threshold and five per cent body fat will definitely help get you up a mountain, but coming down quickly and safely is far more to do with practice and mental attitude than physical ability.

GOING UP

Relatively few bike-handling skills are required to cycle up a mountain; it's more to do with machine preparation and sheer physicality. But there are a few things to think about if you're tackling long and/or steep hills. For a start, you need appropriate gearing. A triple chainset will get you up pretty much anything in Europe, as will a compact chainset with a suitable rear cassette. My lowest gear is a 34x29 (31.7 gear inches), which gets me up anything in the Alps, and even up short ramps of 25 per cent. Bear in mind, I'm old and weigh 86kg — so I need the 29 on the back.

Received wisdom says don't go for your lowest gear straight away on a climb — but sometimes that's easier said than done. Sometimes it's easier not to be changing down while tackling a steep incline. Either way, a relatively high cadence (70 to 90rpm) is more efficient than grinding up at 50rpm.

Moving fore and aft on your saddle brings different muscle groups into play, rather than overworking one particular set.

Sitting forward on the saddle uses your quads, whereas sitting back uses your glutes and hamstrings — so mix it up as you climb. It's also worth going up a couple of gears and climbing out of the saddle, even for a short time (just remember to go back down the gears as you sit back down again).

Experiment with lines

On hairpin bends, you have two choices: the steeper, shorter inside line, or the flatter, longer outside line. Some people power up the inside (often out of the saddle), whereas others spin round the outside. If you've settled into a nice rhythm on the climb and don't want to upset it, the wider line is preferable.

When the road gets seriously steep and you've run out of gears, you may need to lessen the gradient by zig-zagging from one side of the road to the other. Yes, you're cycling further, but by riding across the mountain, you are lessening the gradient and maintaining forward momentum. It's not pretty, but it is effective on very steep ramps. The downside is that you'll have to keep a very careful

lookout for traffic. It also pays to keep an eye on the road surfaces on corners. Sometimes the inside line on a hairpin is gouged and uneven, or poorly repaired, leading to potholes or very sticky tarmac in hot weather.

COMING DOWN

I'm often surprised at how hesitant some pro cyclists are on the descents. A significant percentage of these experienced pros, despite being astonishing athletes capable of putting out 400 watts for hours at a time, seem to be less capable when it comes to going downhill.

The sprinters seem to be the exception to this — perhaps because they're not as fast up the mountain that they have to ride like fury down it in order to make the time-cut.

During the 2013 Giro d'Italia, Bradley Wiggins famously said that he "descended like a bit of a girl". I suspect that Marianne Vos (and most of the women's pro peloton) might have something to say about that. A couple of months later, at the Tour de France, Thibaut Pinot was reduced to tears because his fear and poor descending skills cost him 25 minutes on one Pyrenean stage.

While racing the Grande Boucle in France a few years earlier, Emma Pooley was leading by three minutes when she crested the Tourmalet. Her substantial lead evaporated in just 5km of descending, such was her fear of the descent and such was the effectiveness of Nicole Cooke's bike-handling skills.

Descending is a skill, and one that definitely improves with practice. The more you do it, the better you'll get. □

"Bradley Wiggins once admitted to 'descending like a girl'. Marianne Vos might have something to say about that"

CLIMBING
REQUIRES FEW
VERY SPECIFIC
SKILLS

CLIMB OUT OF
THE SADDLE FROM
TIME TO TIME

DO YOU HAVE
THE RIGHT
GEARS TO GET
UP THE HILL?

Fundamentally, these skills are really no different from the braking and cornering skills we've looked at over the last two months (back issues available here: <http://cyclingweekly.ipcshop.co.uk/shop/magazines/cycling-active-magazine>), you just don't have to do as much pedalling. But there are a few things you need to bear in mind.

Let's start with your bike set-up. If you plan on riding anywhere with long descents, your bike needs to be in tip-top condition:

- Brakes need to be properly adjusted.
- Tyres need to be in good condition and correctly inflated.
- QR skewers need to be firmly fixed.
- Headset and wheel bearings need to be in good nick.
- All the bolts on the bike need to be correctly torqued.

Wheel choice is also important — your deep-section carbon-fibre wheels may be great for a 10km TT or a rolling sportive, but in the high mountains they may not be great. Carbon clinchers are much better today than they were a couple of years ago, but heat build-up under braking is still an issue. Under prolonged braking, carbon rims (particularly cheap ones) can delaminate and fail (or have their tyres fade as a result of the heat build-up). Personally, I stick to rim brakes and wide alloy rims running 25mm tyres for the mountains.

Avoiding brake fade

Of course, if you're running hydraulic disc brakes, you don't have this problem... you have a different problem. The rims don't get hot, the discs do, and on long descents, that can be a problem. Hydraulic brake fluid is hygroscopic (it absorbs water), so when the fluid gets really hot the water molecules within it turn to vapour, the lever comes right back to the handlebar, and the brakes become spongy and fail. Sometimes the bonding agents in the brake pads overheat and release gases that prevent proper pad-to-disc contact. This results in a very wooden feeling at the lever and greatly reduced braking capacity — not good.

There probably aren't many descents in the UK long and steep enough to produce braking temperatures high enough to cause problems — but in southern Europe, there are plenty. So though disc brakes solve some problems, they can cause others. If you're running hydraulic discs, it might be wise to stump up for the best pads you can get, replace your hydraulic fluid, and follow the correct bedding-in procedures before heading for the mountains.

With your bike properly set up and ready to go, the next thing to think about is safety. While it might be tempting to throw yourself down a descent to see if you can nudge 50mph, bear in mind the following:

- Mountains are steep, and going off the road can result in a very long drop.
- Mountains are often a long way from hospital; miles from medical care.
- Mountain roads are often in terrible condition due to extreme weather.
- Hitting tarmac at 50mph will result in very serious road-rash, and worse.
- Mountains attract Jeremy Clarkson wannabes driving Audi TTs badly in a hopeless bid to prove their manliness.
- Not everyone else on a bike is as good at descending as you are.

So rule one of descending is to ride within your limits. Unless you're in a race, there's no point taking risks.

In terms of technique, smoothness is the key. A smooth, fluid descent will be faster than furious acceleration and braking. Slow in, fast out of each corner is definitely the way to go. We looked at braking in some depth in the March issue — remember that it will be easier to unload and skid the rear wheel under braking because of the downward slope of the road. Shuffling as far back on the saddle as you can get will put a little more weight over the back wheel and make it slightly less prone to locking up under braking.

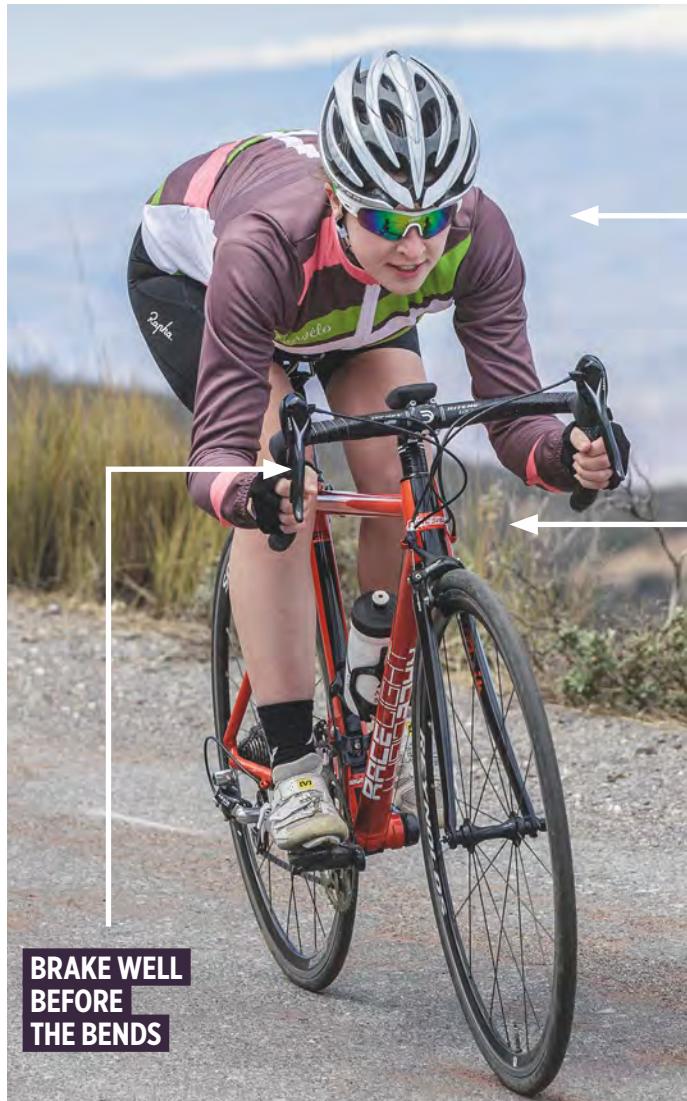
It's also important to brake firmly and efficiently, rather than dragging your brakes all the way down, to prevent your rims and/or brakes from overheating. If necessary, alternate between front and back brakes to give them a bit more time to cool. As we saw last month, optimal braking and cornering is achieved from the drops. It's entirely possible to descend off a large mountain while riding on the hoods, but you will get more power and control from the drops.

Take a break

With your weight thrown forward as you descend, and with the high braking demands on your body, many riders experience numbness and cramps in their hands during long descents. In extreme cases, this can make braking very difficult. If you start to suffer numbness or cramps, stop. Pull over, take a drink, get your phone out and take some pictures of the scenery, get the feeling back into your hands, and then go again. Arriving at a hairpin bend at 40mph and realising you can't pull the brake levers is not a good situation.

Only fools rush in

Adjust your speed before the corner, check out the road surface, identify the apex, look through the corner, and give yourself room for manoeuvre. Depending on the gradient, you may be able to see quite a long way down. If you can, look out for vehicles coming up the hill, which may have to swing very wide on the tight corners. Try and time your descent so that you meet these hazards on the straights rather than on the corners. Vehicles may slosh diesel onto corners, too — so make



**BRAKE WELL
BEFORE
THE BENDS**

What not to do

Do not follow vehicles or other bikes in front of you. You will unwittingly emulate their errors

sure you pay close attention to the road surfaces on the bends.

Ride more to combat irrational fear

Many cyclists feel 'the fear' when it comes to descending, particularly those who haven't a huge amount of two-wheeled experience. A certain level of fear is a good thing, but if it becomes a major impediment to your cycling enjoyment, you need to think about overcoming it (or, less practically, moving to Norfolk).

The key is experience and practice. The more you ride, and the more you descend, the more comfortable you become with it. Have a look at YouTube clips of Cancellara or Sagan descending; study their technique (ignore their sitting on the top tube antics), and try to understand what it is that they are doing so well. Admittedly, it's easier for them because they're

"The key is experience. The more you practise, the more comfortable you'll become when descending"



**CHECK OUT THE
ROAD AHEAD FOR
POTENTIAL
PROBLEMS**

**RIDE WITHIN
YOUR LIMITS AND
ENJOY YOURSELF**

**LOOK THROUGH
THE CORNER**

- racing on closed roads, but the technique is fundamentally the same:
- Adopt a relaxed attitude on the bike.
 - Try not to tense up or grip too tightly.
 - Brake well before the corners.
 - Look through the corner to the apex and exit.
 - Check out the road surface for potential problems. Concentrate.
 - Meandering off-line is easy at 40mph, and happens quickly.
 - Use the whole road if it's safe to do so (check in front and behind).
 - Stop for a breather from time to time if it's a very long descent.
 - Leave plenty of room between yourself and the rider in front.
 - Don't blindly follow another rider; if they get it wrong, you will too.
 - Proceed at a comfortable speed.
 - Practise, practise, practise!
 - Enjoy it. You did the hard bit getting to the top, now it's fun time.

Just as some people are physiologically suited to climbing, some are mentally suited to descending — it's a psychological thing. Even if descending doesn't come naturally, it is something that will come with practice and patience.

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Gears: 11-speed
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Tyres: Clinchers
Handlebars: Ergonomic
Seatpost: Adjustable
Saddle: Ergonomic
Crankset: Hollowtech II
Chainring: 50/34
Pedals: Look Delta II
Cassette: Shimano Ultegra 11-speed
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FITNESS

TRAINING SESSION OF THE MONTH

Sustainable power

A training session specifically designed to make going faster feel easier

Words Hannah Reynolds Photo Daniel Gould

Why?

If you can increase the power you produce at a given level of exertion, you will go faster without trying harder. This could mean that on a group ride you'll sustain the same pace as everyone else but find it easier — and there will be something left in the tank for the big hill at the end or the sprint to the cafe.

Riding on your own, you will be able to ride faster without it feeling more difficult.

How?

One of the key sessions for pushing up your sustainable power output is riding for extended amounts of time at an effort often called the 'sweet spot'. At this effort, you may feel like you want to stop but don't need to stop; you can sustain it despite the discomfort.

It's a pace you can manage, with concentration, for 20 minutes. The benefit of this type of effort is that you can recover from it relatively quickly, allowing you to pack a large amount of good-quality training into your week.

When?

You can do these 20-minute blocks as a standalone session on the road or on the turbo-trainer indoors. Many pro riders or those able to do a high volume of training per week will add these into longer endurance rides, doing two blocks of 20 minutes within a two to five-hour otherwise steady training session.

TRAINING SESSION	
Time elapsed (mins)	Zone
0-10	1
10-15	2
15-35	3
35-40	1
40-60	3
60-1.05	1

How often?

- As long as you fuel well during and after these rides, you should be able to complete as many as three each week.
- Try to increase the amount of time you accumulate riding at your 'sweet spot' by adding it into several longer rides throughout the week.



Tip

Try to maintain the same effort throughout the 20 minutes. This may mean easing off slightly uphill and having to pedal like mad downhill.

Finding a flat route can pay dividends for these sessions



What is a micro- adventure?

- One night away
- Get away from it all
- See something new
- Out of your comfort zone
- Cheap as chips

A bargain bivvy adventure

CA staffers Daniel, Kevin and Chris take a ride out of town and hunker down under the stars for a bargain night out, in nature's own hotel

Words Chris Catchpole **Photos** Daniel Gould

We all need some adventure, every now and then. With my work and social life falling in to routine I was in need of excitement; I just didn't know where to find it. I coerced a couple of colleagues into joining me on a little trip, to blow away the cobwebs of work, reinvigorate our sense of adventure and kick start our lust for life.

My workmates, Dan and Kevin, are busy people, but they were keen. Generic responsibilities and home duties made a full-blown cycle touring holiday out of the question. A weekend away? Perhaps, but almost as difficult to arrange, with three separate social calendars making a mockery of our long weekend ideas.

Anything is possible though, and I had an idea. We shared an office. We were almost always together in this office, from Monday

morning to Friday evening. There was only one thing for it — a microadventure.

Talk about the Ronseal approach, a microadventure does what it says on the tin. It doesn't matter if it's a day out, or an evening away, it's simply the idea of adventure, boiled down to fit easily in to any hectic lifestyle. We decided to follow the traditional formula, inspired by Alastair Humphreys's book (see boxout). It would involve a night away, sleeping under the stars and out of your comfort zone. Simple as that. And hopefully, a piece of cake to organise.

We ply our trade in Croydon central, so from there we would ride south, as the sun set in the west. We would keep riding south until we were hungry. We would then stop for some dinner, before continuing or ride until we found a suitably quiet spot to park our bikes, and an isolated and harmless patch of ground on which to fall to sleep.

It's so simple. A nice bike ride, a pub dinner, a good night's rest, and a ride back to the office the next day. Even those working in

central London can join in the fun. We picked an arbitrary date in the spring, and with minimal planning, rolled south on a beautifully calm evening under blue skies.

Croydon isn't known for its cycling infrastructure, so we dart across town as quickly as possible on our regular lunchtime cycling route. Surprisingly, especially for anyone that's ever driven in Croydon, it only takes a few miles before the impatient cars and eccentric locals disappear behind, and we climb our way towards the quiet country lanes of Tatsfield.

Happy snaps

We continue to follow our lunch special up and over several hills, and along some very quiet country lanes. Stopping to let evening equestrian activities and relaxed car drivers pass, our photographer Dan takes a moment to capture our first snap while we're still relatively cheery. We don't know how far we'll ride tonight, but we left our offices around six pm, and we're not expecting the light to fade until 10. How far that gets us, we're not sure, but at the moment we don't care. The sun is shining and our legs are spinning; it's bliss.

We're doing exactly what we (vaguely) ▶



planned, and that's leaving the stresses of work behind us. We keep telling our readers that cycling is a great antidote to the weight of modern life, and each mile pedalled is a mile further from the hustle and bustle of city life. Rather than regurgitating work worries with the people who understand them best, we chat instead about where we're going, what we might see, and which of us will die first at the hands of a gaggle of irritable wild fowl.

You don't need any technical kit for this type of adventure. A bike is a good start, but nothing too fancy. We all had touring bikes from our own cycle touring histories, and we carried a pannier or two full of nonsense we probably didn't need, but some kit we definitely did. Dan was the hardest working, carrying precious camera kit. But I wasn't making things easy for myself either. A stove and coffee pot for the morning brew were unnecessary extras I included along with my essentials — a sleeping bag and bivvy bag for a comfortable night's rest.

After 10 or so miles we leave familiar roads, and descend 'the ridge' quickly down towards the M25. I'd had this in my head as the big barrier we needed to cross to truly get ourselves outside of London, and with great speed, we do it.

As we cross the M25, time is ticking on, and the highway to hell is as busy as ever. An endless river of red and white moves in a hurry, and I imagine the people looking up at us with envy at the fine adventure we're having, so close to home.

As casually as this was planned, there had been some forethought. When browsing a map, south became the obvious direction of travel, giving us the quickest access to what a Londoner would call countryside. And as I traced a straight line down, I noticed a very big town by the name of Crawley that we didn't want to end up in. To avoid that, it was decided that we would head mostly south-by-south east, avoiding any big towns, travelling on mostly quiet roads until a place to eat revealed itself.

Lost in the moment

Talk turns from what we might see to what we might eat, and we begin to keep our eyes and noses up for good-looking pubs. We're only an hour or so away from our office, but we're hungry. Stopping for photos is a nice break, but it slows us down, and before we realise, the sun begins its descent.

It's lovely round here, and we've hit upon the moment we were all after. Lost in thought, miles from anywhere, we're mid-adventure and the afternoon of office work isn't

"We carried a pannier or two full of nonsense we probably didn't need, but some kit that we definitely did"

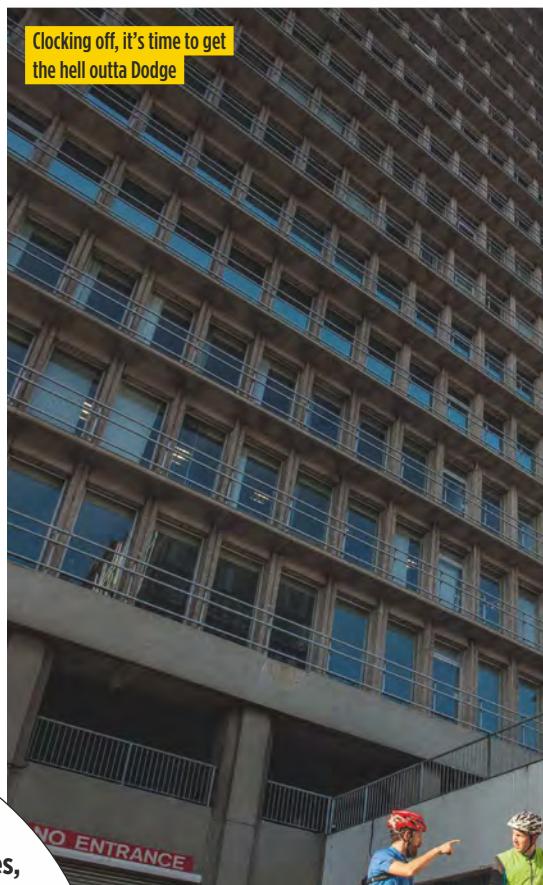
even a memory, it doesn't touch our minds. All we can think of is the next step; we're in the zone.

To protect the honour of the victims (and ourselves), I'll skip the specific details of where we slept. Suffice to say, after nearly 25 miles we pass an enticing pub, with the faces of two friendly cyclists sitting outside for a drink. Just beyond, a quiet path diverts us away from an already quiet road, and we find a nice secluded patch of grass, well away from traffic, houses or wild fowl. This is just what we're looking for.

Meet the boss

We circle back to the pub for a well-earned dinner. But wait a minute! That friendly face is familiar. It's none other than this magazine's own editor, Luke Edwardes-Evans. He's out for a ride on his mountain bike with a friend, so we stop for a chat and explain why we're over his neck of the woods. Small world.

He loves the adventure of our ride, and we talk a while about where we're sleeping and if we'll survive the night. Out here, what feels like a world away from the office, we don't talk about work. Instead it's local ales, the pub's menu and rideable bridleways that make up the agenda. After a while he departs, and three burgers later, we're about ready to leave too. Over dinner, the anticipation about actually sleeping wild, with only a layer of bivvy bag for protection, starts to grow. The local brew builds the confidence though, and we ride back to our preselected destination. Upon arrival, a herd of deer gives a glance, but decides to leave us to it. With nothing but stars above us, some trees behind, and a huge open expanse of field in front, this spot is perfect. □



Sleeping rough...

For the final word on microadventures, Alastair Humphreys's website is the place to go. Once named among National Geographic's 'Adventurers of the Year', Alastair knows all there is about sleeping wild while staying safe and snug. In fact, Google the word 'microadventure' and Alastair more or less monopolises the first page of results with his shenanigans and adventures. His book Local Discoveries for Great Escapes is full of great ideas for "close to home, cheap, simple, short, and yet very effective" adventures.



Bikes, panniers, action: it's all you need for a microadventure



Would any microadventure be complete without a scene like this one?





Having woken under a cloud,
Chris contemplates a coffee



Work is a distant memory as the boys spin out a blissful rhythm in the sun



"Without a proper breakfast, our chatty outlook falters as we negotiate some tough climbs on the way back"

Brew's up!

I assume we'll wake up with the sun, at around 5 to 6am. We don't. Instead, we wake up in a cloud. The sun is nowhere to be seen, and the day has crept up on us before we had a chance to rouse from deep sleep. It's not 5am at all. It's not even 6am. It's 7. I realise at this moment that we're probably going to be late to work, and I get that sinking feeling everybody gets when you oversleep an important alarm.

I then realise a second or two later that this is kind of work for us, so forget all about it and get some coffee on. After spilling it, and then eating some crisps for breakfast, we pack our kit rapidly and hit the road, leaving no sign of our passing through.

Things feel very different this morning. Last night's twilight is replaced with a sea of hazy grey, and the road, which was apparently downhill, feels a bit of a slog this morning. We're only a couple of dozen miles from the office, so the ride back is never going to be that tough, but without a proper breakfast, our chatty outlook falters as we negotiate some tricky climbs.

After a solid hour of riding, we stop and grab some breakfast. We've made good time, and we'll probably get back to the office almost on schedule. We don't need to worry now how much trouble we'll be in as we arrive, grass in hair, and an hour late to our desks. We stop and chat while we eat some pastries, and it feels as if last night's office exit from Croydon was a long, long time ago. An adventure away from the office, no matter how short, can feel a world away.

We roll back to the office feeling mighty, a slight smell of the wild about us, and take our seats at our desks. Lycra is a common occurrence in our office, as you'd expect, so no one batted an eyelid as we all returned after an epic, albeit short adventure that took us from the centre of Croydon to sleeping in a ditch, and back again, in just over 12 hours. **End**

Website...

[www.alastairhumphreys.com/
category/blog/microadventure/](http://www.alastairhumphreys.com/category/blog/microadventure/)

Book...

www.amazon.co.uk/Microadventures-Local-Discoveries-Great-Escapes/dp/0007548036

Just coasting

The loop around Great Orme in North Wales is the basis of one of the best circular coastal bike rides in the UK

Words and photos Paul Kirkwood

The drawback with most coastal bike rides is that you either have to come back the same way or, more often, have a relatively boring inland return route, or have to use the train if one is available. What makes this route along the North Wales shoreline exceptional is that no repetition is necessary and the sea is seldom out of view — and what a view it is. You enjoy a constantly changing, coastal panorama featuring promenades, dunes and dramatic rocky outcrops.

There's never been more beach to see at Colwyn Bay. In the last couple of years, thousands of tonnes of sand have been pumped from a dredger moored a mile out to sea onto the beach, as part of a coastal defence and regeneration scheme.

The start of my journey took me from Colwyn Bay along the seafront to Llandudno and inland briefly through Penrhyn. My first impression of Llandudno was that just about every house on the seafront seemed to be a guesthouse, each competing to have the most colourful sign and grandest name.

Then came the hotels, the Queens, Imperial and Grand among them. The names don't impress everyone, though. At the promenade I spotted a fellow sat on a

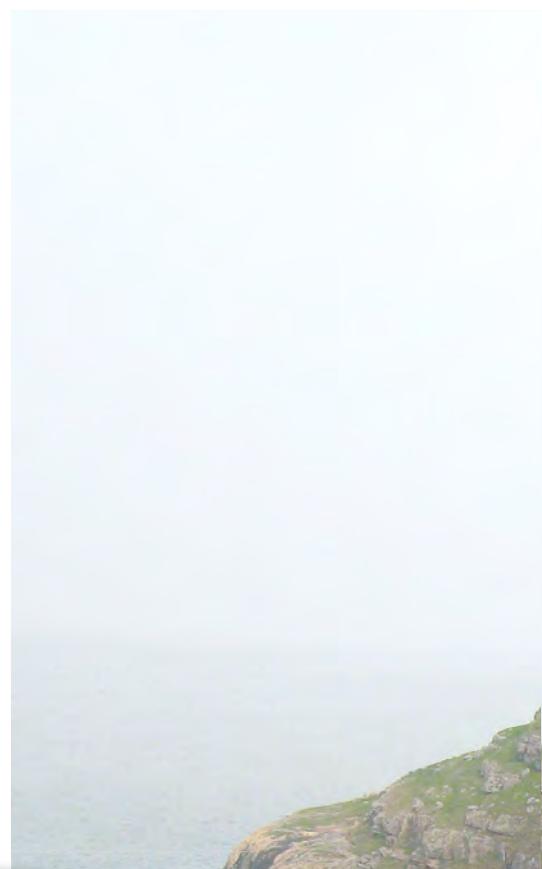
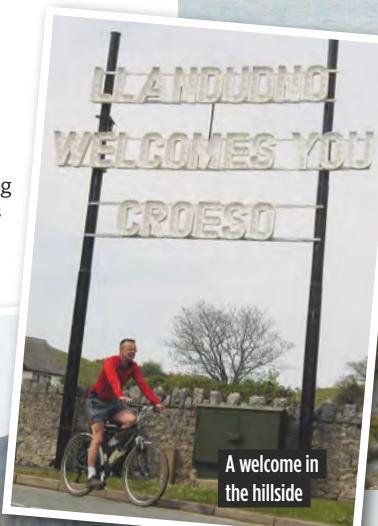
bench clutching a Thomas Cook brochure for Spain and Portugal. Later I passed the Electric Beach tanning salon, a further reminder that, while 'wet Wales' may be an unfair reputation, not every day is as bright as when I cycled.

There's no end of choice for holidaymakers wishing to explore the Great Orme headland. They can go by boat on a 'trip around the bay', on a cable car from Happy Valley to the summit on the longest aerial cabin lift in the UK, by tram from Victoria station, by bus on the Great Orme Marine Drive Tour and on foot via one of three trails. No mention of the bicycle among all the signs on the prom, but this has to be the best form of transport for the excursion (although I'm probably biased).

The toll road is free for bikes but there is a charge of £2.50 for motor vehicles. That's double good news for cyclists as it means they pretty much have the road to themselves. At least, I did.

Once through the tollgate the only sound came from the occasional gull and gentle lapping of the sea on the rocks below. It's a one-way road which means that, once round the headland, you can bomb down the

19 miles



HEADS UP

A bit of a climb up Great Orme but otherwise easy riding, much of it off-road



Distance: 19 miles
Big hills: None
Challenge: ★★☆☆☆☆
Cafe stops: Plenty



Majestic views on
Marine Drive



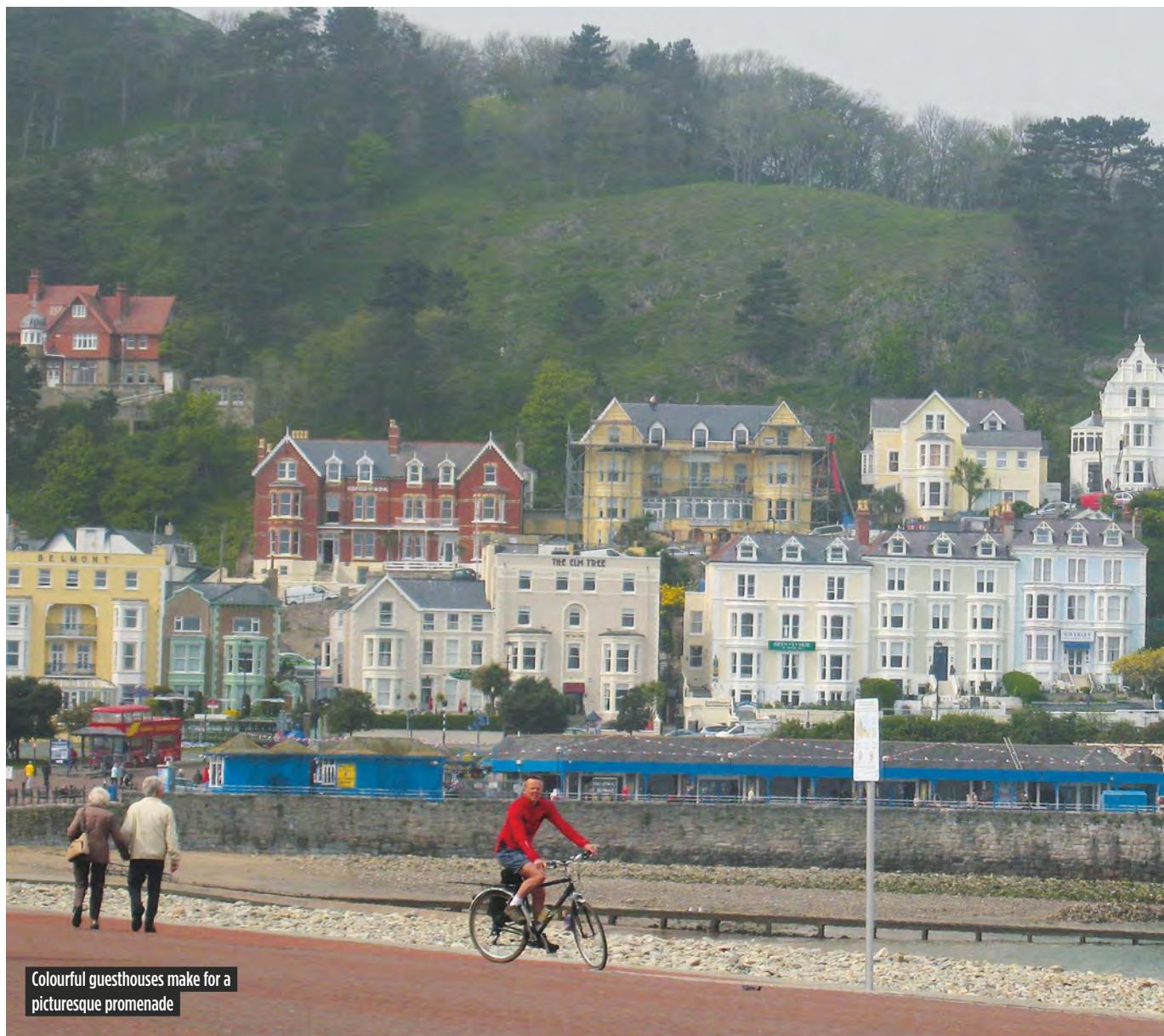
descent without fear of meeting a car coming in the other direction.

The Tour of Britain visited this region last September on stage two of the race, which finished in Llandudno, via Conwy and Deganwy. In fact, the professional peloton raced down the Great Orme's Marine Drive in the final few kilometres of the stage, before sprinting along the Llandudno seafront.

The road hugs the coast, the sea to your right and towering limestone crags to your left combining to make a landscape that reminded me of Corsica and the Yorkshire Dales. I passed a group of students walking in the opposite direction carrying striped surveying

poles and tape measures. No doubt they were on one of the many geography field trips that take place hereabouts. Resisting the temptations of the Rest and Be Thankful cafe, I continued another 100 yards and opted for an alfresco lunch from a superb viewpoint on an outcrop of rocks.

Just around the headland to the south the houses in Gogarth are very desirable, all boasting gardens that slope down to the sea. One property had a mock castellated entrance and another looked fully like a castle, perhaps mimicking Conwy Castle just around the corner. I was disappointed when the double yellow lines reappeared to remind me that I ➤



Colourful guesthouses make for a picturesque promenade



PUBS AND GRUB

Rest and Be Thankful Coffee Shop, Great Orme, www.restandbethankful.net. 01492 870004

West Shore Beach Cafe, West Shore Promenade, Llandudno, www.westshorebeachcafe.com 01492 872958

The Toad Pub, West Promenade, Colwyn Bay 01492 532726

BIKE SHOP

West End Cycles, 121 Conway Road, Colwyn Bay, LL29 7LS, 01492 530269

PLACES TO VISIT

Conwy Castle Built in the 13th century by Edward I and today a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Open daily. Admission £6.75 for adults. www.cadw.wales.gov.uk

Great Orme Mines Believed to be the world's largest prehistoric mine discovered, dating back to the Bronze Age. Open daily from March to Oct. Admission £6.75. www.greatormemines.info



was back on a public road again. I felt like I'd gone from being out in the wilds to the seaside within a few yards.

At the start of 2014, this region was hit by storms. Among stricken properties was the West Shore Beach Cafe, which only reopened in mid-June last year. Long stretches of the cycle path were unpassable until August.

Finally, Conwy Castle came into view. It wasn't situated unmissably on high as I'd imagined it would be; in fact, from a distance it appeared to be tucked away beneath some trees. These days it's unceremoniously hemmed in between the main road and railway on the far side of Thomas Telford's suspension bridge over the estuary.

At this point my efforts to link two cycle routes got me tangled up in the Tesco supermarket car park, and somewhat optimistically I followed those silly cycle lanes that go for about 10 yards then return you to the main road. I couldn't blame anything but myself for my route confusion but make sure you follow the road book for this part of the route.

I scratched my head a lot (to put it politely), investigated just about every public right of way in the vicinity and finally connected to my intended route into the country. Ah, bliss! Above were newly greened hedgerows and a winding lane, while below was the ever-rumbling A55 dual carriageway.

The pastoral scene was a pleasant end to the route but I couldn't wait to get back to Colwyn Bay. Navigational challenges apart, I do like to be beside the seaside. **End**



ROAD BOOK

Start at the Victoria Pier and pavilion in Colwyn Bay and head north on the promenade to pass Rhos-on-Sea. The road bears left and briefly away from the shore. At a roundabout next to the Co-op follow signs for route 5 of the National Cycle Network, as if you were going to join the B5115 dual carriageway, but instead take the cycle route that runs beside it. At a T-junction next to the 'Llandudno welcomes you' sign, turn left. As you descend be careful not to miss the cycle path on the left which looks like a private driveway. Descend on the narrow and slightly bumpy track to the B5115 then turn left.

Pass along Llandudno promenade towards the Grand Hotel, at which point turn right to follow Marine Drive around Great Orme. On the other side of the headland, just before the breakwater, start picking up signs for route 5 again and fork right

onto a cycle track to pass a boating lake. Keep ahead on the cycle route along the edge of the dunes towards a second breakwater. In Deganwy the route briefly shares Marine Crescent. Just before you reach the railway crossing in the village, fork right to cycle along a path to the left of a high wall. Follow the route up to the approach road for Conwy Bridge.

Pass an arch artwork, then at a red dog waste bin very close by turn left onto a cycle path beside the A55, keeping a white metal fence on your left. Cross the railway and, at the roundabout sign, descend steps on the left to the minor road below. Turn right under the A55, go through an underpass then, at roundabout in front of the Old Station pub, turn right onto the A547 to pass Llandudno Junction station. After a roundabout, as the road bears right towards the railway turn left down Pabo Lane. Take first right down Station Road to cross the railway. At T-junction turn left onto A547. At Lidl supermarket turn left down Princes Drive

then, after Colwyn Bay station, fork immediately left and use underpass below railway to return to the pier.

Note: Don't do this route the other way round as the toll road around Great Orme is one-way, anti-clockwise.





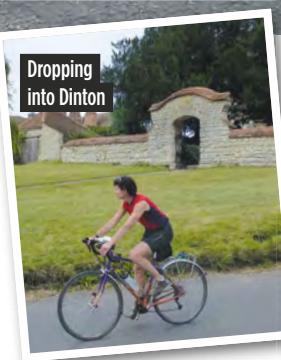
Bucks whizz

Cath Harris treks amid the tranquility of rural Bucks, unveiling a bucolic and historic tapestry

Words Cath Harris Photos Margaret Harris

Pore over a map of Buckinghamshire and amid the intricate sprawl of roads, railways, landmarks and contour lines and you might spot five intriguing words: The Three Hundreds of Aylesbury. They have no obvious anchor but instead span three of the navigational folds straddling the diagonal north-western limits of the verdant but steep-sided Chiltern Hills. Flecked with green for woodlands and

haphazardly latticed yellow by the enticing web of cycling-perfect minor roads, these mediaeval land divisions — introduced by the Saxons for tax, judicial or military purposes — once numbered 18 but over time have been merged to leave just three. Authorities today have other means of amassing funds and running our courts and armies but this ancient description stands firm. Our route visits all three small but historic areas.



HEADS UP

A challenging but beautiful tour of the historic Hundreds of Aylesbury



Distance: 28 miles (45km)

Big hills: 5

Challenge: ★★★☆☆

Cafe stops: 3



Cruising by religion: at St John the Baptist church in Stone

28
miles



Olde worlde architecture enhances route aesthetics

We start in bustling Wendover, an attractive market town built on the eastern slopes of the Wendover Gap, a dry valley through which run road and rail links to London. It is a gateway to the Chilterns from the relatively flat Vale of Aylesbury. Despite the apparent lack of water in the valley, the name Wendover derives from a Celtic term for 'white waters'. In this instance it refers to chalk deposits associated with a chalk aquifer flowing through

Wendover. An arm of the Grand Union Canal also reaches the town.

We climb past Wendover's cobbled pavements, timber-framed houses and thatched cottages — and Rumsey's chocolaterie — for our first striking view of the 350-square mile Aylesbury Vale. The curving lines of flourishing hedgerows and vehicle tracks through arable fields merge into one, coaxing the eye to the conglomeration of Aylesbury and beyond.

The road dips and climbs through beech woodlands where a pretty flint cottage is cradled in one hollow. At Butlers Cross we leave the Chiltern foothills for a sojourn in the Vale.

We roll through farmland and a simple but swooningly pastoral picture formed of blue sky, golden fields and distant trees glowing with the greens of summer. Cylinders of harvested wheat await collection as if monuments to a successful farming year. A heavy crop of bullace plums, each the size of a large marble, droops from the branches of rambling copses before Bishopstone. Bledlow Ridge is a striking but distant landmark at a level crossing. At Stone, an impressive avenue of tall conifers draws visitors to the church.

The Pebble Way cycle path runs

alongside the Stone to Thame A418 but involves crossing roads and is barely worth taking. The route is not overly busy and holds no fears for a hunting red kite that scours thickets close to the carriageway in search of its next meal. Red kites had been persecuted to extinction in England and Scotland by the late 1800s but reintroduction schemes in a number of UK locations have succeeded. The Chilterns were the red kite's first release site in 1989 and a trip to the region can reap several show-stopping sightings of this beautiful forked-tailed raptor.

We turn through sleepy Upton and are soon in Dinton which has its own tale of persecution. Over the wall from 12th century Church of St Peter and St Paul is Dinton Hall, the bulbous chimneys of which stand defiantly against the sky. It is here, in 1612, that Simon Mayne was born. He and two other Dinton men are likely to have been the hooded executioners of Charles I, 37 years later. On visiting Dinton after Charles's defeat at the Battle of Naseby — which the Battlefields Trust suggests was the most important battle ever fought in England — the King's vanquisher, Oliver Cromwell, gifted his sword to Mayne. It remained at Dinton Hall



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for 300 years. Another alleged executioner, Hall employee John Bigg, became a hermit after the King's death, hiding in a cave in Dinton for more than three decades to escape capture by resurgent Royalists.

Pretty Haddenham

Less than three miles on is pretty Haddenham, which has a much less turbulent past. Developments in agriculture and transport from the 1830s on transformed this large village from a farming community to an important staging post between London and Birmingham. Thanks to Beeching, however, Haddenham railway station lasted only 60 years. A new station was opened in 1987 after the village population swelled. The appearance of many Haddenham buildings — thatched, timbered or coated in pebbledash — suggests they have a long history. Walls were once constructed from witchert, a mixture of decayed limestone subsoil, straw and water peculiar to the area. The museum behind the Methodist church in the High Street details this method of building and hosts an interesting collection of other exhibits.

Near the museum is the Little Italy Espresso Bar but we opt instead for the delicious homemade snacks of the Cottage Bakery opposite the cafe. Haddenham's idyllically-set pond on the outskirts of the village is perfect for picnicking. On one side is the village green, behind is a pub and beyond the pond a church. As we relax, a huge HGV, emblazoned with the livery of HRH The Prince of Wales, squeezes between parked cars to make a delivery. It's as if modern day life has come bludgeoning into a gentler past.

Thick hedges that will offer sustenance for winter wildlife flank the lanes towards Monks Risborough on

Above: There is no shortage of potential feed stops en route

Above right:
Crossing the tracks
— from the foothills
to the vale



the next section of our ride. Above one, on a descent towards England's oldest parish, we have our first glimpse of Whiteleaf Cross, an 85-foot tall emblem carved into the chalk hillside. Before we reach it we stop briefly at atmospheric St Dunstan's Church in Monks Risborough. The 10th century archbishop is portrayed in wood carvings in the porch, successfully tackling Satan whose nose he grips with blacksmiths tongs.

We suffer a different sort of burn on the climb to Whiteleaf Cross but the near-180° panorama from above it, stretching as far as the Wessex Downs, makes it more than worthwhile. We ride to the viewpoint along a firmly-surfaced bridleway. Nearby are World War I practice trenches, a Neolithic burial mound and habitats used by butterflies and other insect specialists of chalk grassland. The first record of the cross itself was noted in 1742 by



PUBS AND CAFES

Cottage Bakery, 17 Fort End, Haddenham HP17 8PJ, 01844 291469. www.thecottagebakery.net

The Plough at Cadsden, Princes Risborough, HP27 0NB, 01844 343302. theplough.pub

Rumsey's Chocolaterie, The Old Bank, 26 High Street, Wendover HP22 6EA, 01296 625 060 [www.rumseys.co.uk/our-shops/wendover](http://rumseys.co.uk/our-shops/wendover)

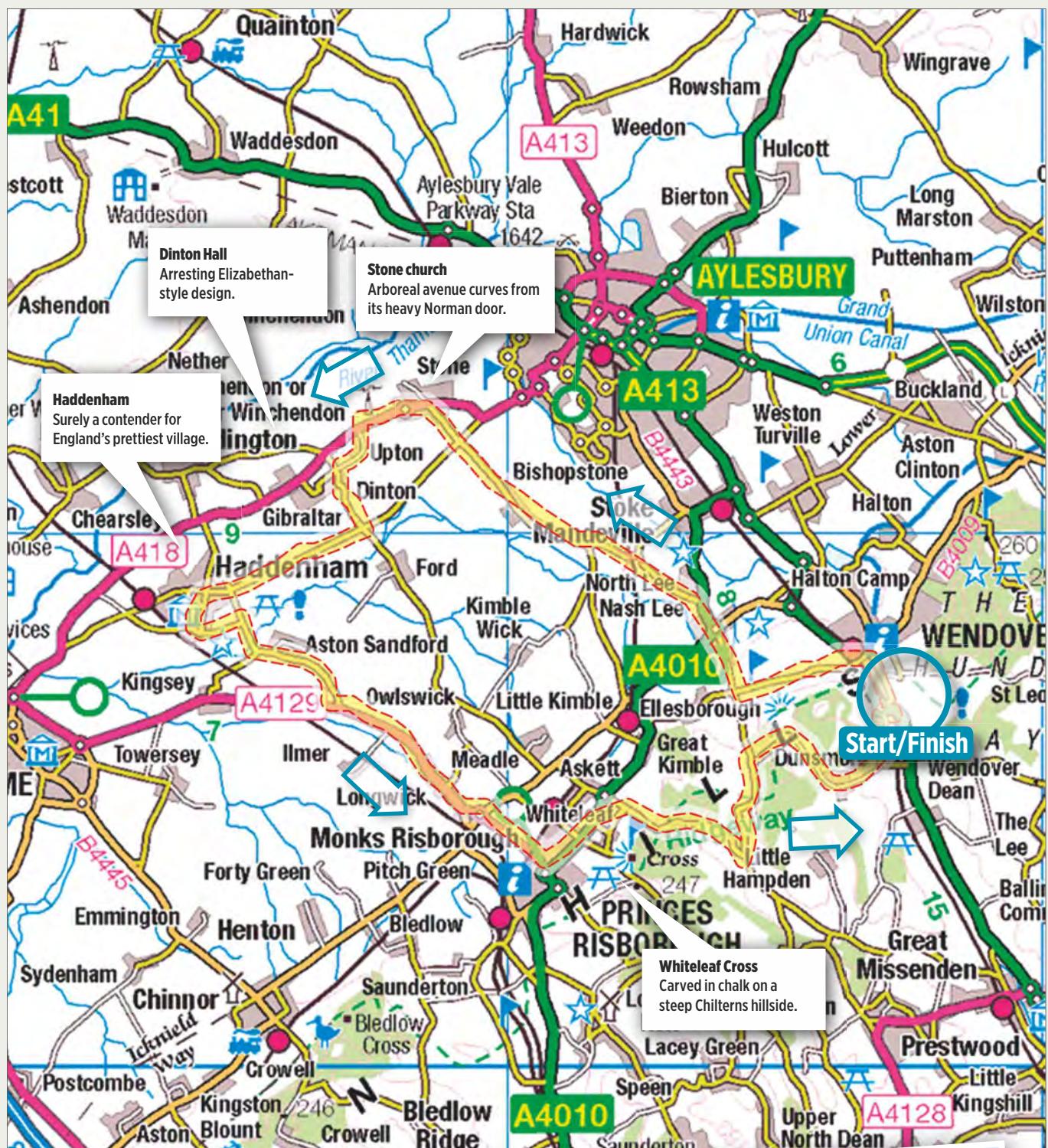
PLACES OF INTEREST

Haddenham Museum, limited opening hours www.haddenham.net/spotlight.html

St Dunstan's Church, atmospheric ancient shrine

Whiteleaf Cross, 85-foot tall and of mysterious origin

Wendover Clock Tower, elegant 19th century market hall, fire station and lock-up.



ROAD BOOK

Climb Wendover High Street from the library car park. Follow to crossroads at Butlers Cross. Turn right signed Aylesbury. At the roundabout turn right onto the A4010 then fork left before a Total garage signed Bishopstone. Follow over crossroads to Stone. Turn left onto the A418. Take first left to Upton and continue to Dinton where turn left at crossroads. Pass the church then turn right at crossroads. Follow to Haddenham war memorial where turn left into the High Street then left into Townside. Left again at T-junction. Follow past pond out of Haddenham. Right at T signed Princes Risborough. Left after small humpback bridge then left onto the A4129. In Longwick turn left signed Ford and right at T to Owlswick. Cross staggered crossroads to Monks Risborough. Turn right then left signed Whiteleaf. Climb to the car park then retrace half way, turning right into Cadson Road. Turn right at T-junction and climb past The Plough. Descend to T-junction and turn left signed Butlers Cross. Turn right at Chequers gatehouse signed Dunmore. Bear left at junction then cross roundabout signed Wendover. Right at mini-roundabout into the town.



The Chilterns' lush slopes form a sumptuous backdrop

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The flat of the land

Eastern England's arable landscape may appear flat and featureless but a two-wheeled tour opens up a wildlife park teeming with historical curiosities

Words Autumn Barlow Photos Andy Jones

Adventurer's Land — is there a place that sounds more romantic and evocative than that? A place of danger, intrigue and thrills. Welcome to, er, the Lincolnshire Fens.

Here is my attempt to introduce you to this much-maligned and overlooked corner of England. It's pancake-flat and empty of all life, or so it seems when you drive through the endless fields of potatoes and peas. By bicycle, however, a new world is revealed.

We start in Spalding, which has the rare distinction of being the bulb capital of the UK. In spring and early summer, this area is alive with colour as far as you can see, but each season has its own beauty. We're here in autumn as the crops are gathered in, and the landscape is golden yellow with straw stacked high in bales. The ride starts at the railway station which is handily near a rash of supermarkets, and there is plenty of parking.

We ignore the museums that Spalding offers — the Bulb Museum, of course, and more surprisingly the Romany Museum — and head out on the first of many long, straight roads, to a place called Pode Hole, where I get wildly over-excited about sluices.

This is it. This is the heart of Adventurer's Land — so named after the 17th century speculators who helped finance the drainage of the fens — where the rivers and cuts and canals and drains and dykes and channels come together. There may be dozens of words for snow in Inuit languages, but on the Fens a watercourse is never just a watercourse.

Four hundred years ago, this was peat bog, and a desolate place that was rumoured to be the hideaway of outlaws and low characters. They scraped a living from fish and fowl. When Charles I needed to raise money, he sold pieces of land (well, swamp) to Gentlemen Adventurers who would pay Dutch engineers to drain the water and create fertile farmland. This is their

32 miles



HEADS UP

An easy ride around undiscovered rural Lincolnshire



Distance: 32 miles

Big hills: 0

Challenge: ★☆☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 1 (Bourne)



"Now where's Pode Hole?"
On the search for rural English oddities

"On a bike you see details. You'll see wildflowers, butterflies, birds and insects out here"

land — Adventurer's Land — it's still marked as that on old maps. The pumping stations and sluices play a vital role to this day. Without them, this agricultural county would be under water once more.

From Pode Hole we ride with the River Glen on our right and a line of majestic willows on our left, through Tongue End and on towards Bourne. By now you're sniggering about the place names of the Fens, aren't you? That's down to the Potato Railway. The various farms laid down narrow tracks to use small locomotives to transport potatoes around, and hamlets often grew up around the 'stations', which needed names. Clerks would look at the maps and simply make stuff up. There is a village called Twenty because it was in a box marked with the number. Tongue End, when viewed on an old map, looks like a

tongue where two rivers meet. I have no idea about Pode Hole.

Clerks would look at the maps

Bourne is a pretty market town with a wealth of understated history, most notably as the alleged birthplace of Hereward the Wake, and hometown to Raymond Mays, the racing driver of the 1920s and 30s. We press on. The route skirts the edge of town, and follows a narrow road to the village of Dyke. Then there's a short section along the A15 but luckily there's a cycle path, and we use it.

Thankfully we soon leave the main road and turn off right along another minor road to the lovely village of Dunsby, all stone cottages and flowers round the doors. The chocolate-box prettiness is a brief respite but within a few miles we're back on the flat Fen roads once more, and heading out towards Gosberton.

This is pure Fenland. In a car, it seems featureless. On a bike, you see details. Farmers leave wide field margins and pesticide use is regulated. You'll see wildflowers, butterflies, birds and insects out here. Andy stops for every passing bird, and I get excited by glimpses of late-flowering cowslips.





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Sprawling farmland and big skies are the Fens' signature features

STOP!



PUBS

Bourne has a wealth of pubs and cafes.
Rollaway, Abbey Road, PE10 9EF,
01778 393769.

Smith's Bar, North Street, PE10 9AE,
01778 426819.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Ayscoughfee Hall Museum — Mediaeval hall, free to enter, Wednesday-Sunday
Churchgate, Spalding, PE11 2RA,
01775 764555.

TRANSPORT LINKS

Spalding Railway is served by East Midlands Trains. Regular trains from Lincoln, Peterborough and Doncaster.



Recovering from the headwind climbing simulator

The other stunning feature of the Fen landscape is the sky. The sky here is bigger than anywhere else, except possibly at sea. The clouds become hills, and the sunsets can be breathtaking. At night, the sparse population of Lincolnshire means there is little light pollution, and the star-scapes are amazing.

If we don't get a move on, we'll be appreciating the stars, so we cruise through the Gosberton villages (Gosberton Clough, Gosberton Risegate and Gosberton itself) and

down to Surfleet. The Gosbertons are unremarkable collections of farms and market gardens, but in Surfleet we are alarmed to see that a church seems about to fall over. It leans over the road at a terrifying angle — around six feet from the perpendicular, due to the soft Fen soil. We avoid being crushed, and cross the River Glen once more. Within a short time we're back in Spalding.

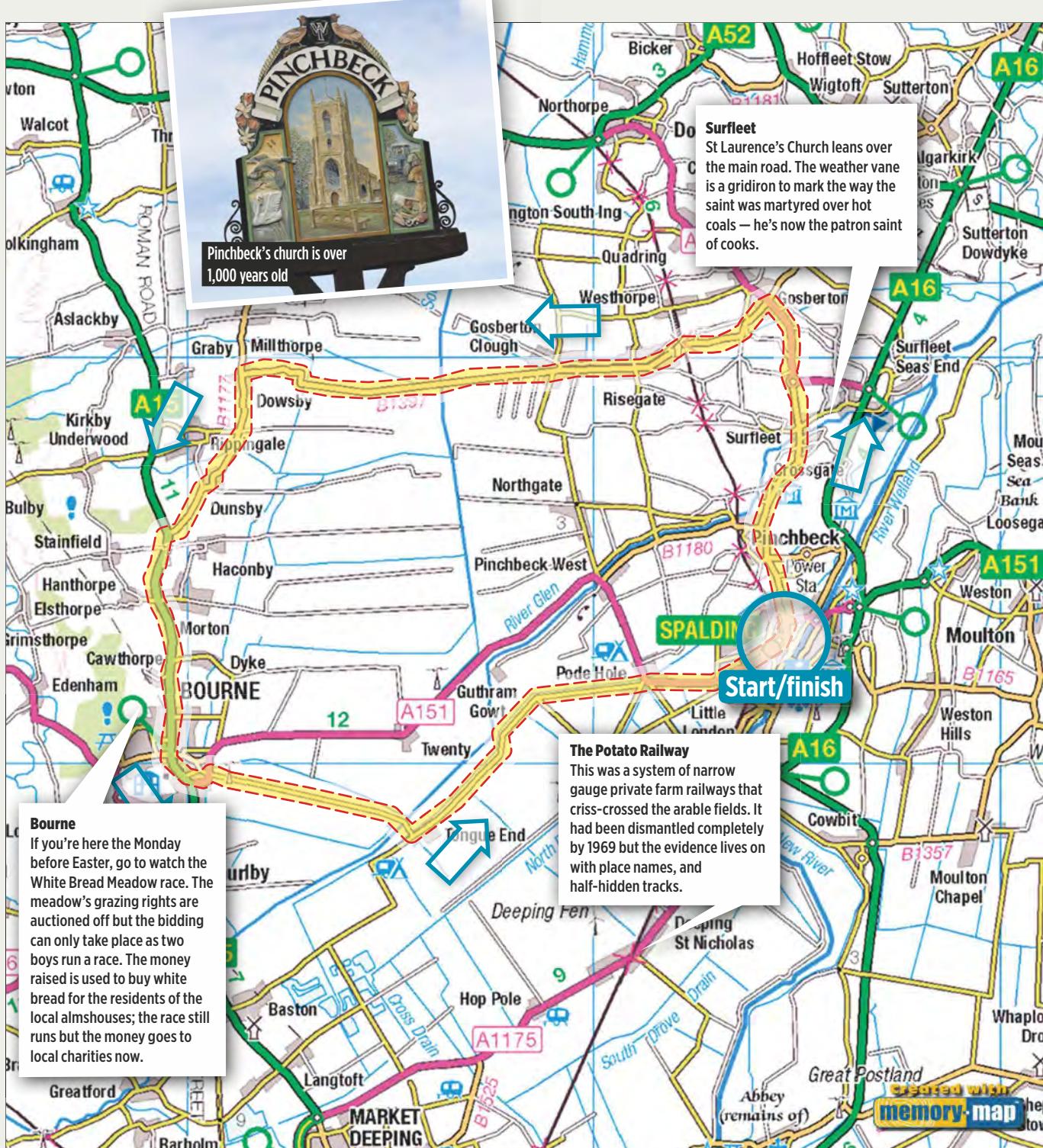
Fast and furious

When there's a stiff headwind sapping your

efforts, cycling in this area can be as hard as climbing any hill. If the wind is behind you, you never mention it — you can claim you were having 'a good day'. There are few villages and fewer shops, so treat it like a remote wilderness and come prepared with food and drink. The main roads are notoriously fast, but get onto the minor roads and you'll have the whole place to yourself. Also, you can see approaching vehicles from about 10 miles away.

Ready to go adventuring?

End



ROAD BOOK

With Spalding railway station behind you, turn right along the A151 and follow the straight road through the town and then out along a residential road. The houses become less frequent and then you're in pure flat fenland.

You'll soon come to Pode Hole, with pumping stations to your right and left. Stop to read the Deeping Fen By-Laws painted up on the side of a building, or continue, turning left from the A151 to follow the sign marked Tongue End. This road is The Delph, where the local cycle clubs run their time trials.

Just after the settlement of Tongue End, turn sharp right over a small bridge and then a larger one — this is the River Glen. Follow this long, straight road for three miles until you reach Bourne.

Turn right at the junction, following Cherry Tree Road through a quiet industrial area, then briefly right onto the A151 and then left onto a small, quiet road called Meadow Drove.

Follow this road through the village of Dyke, and then turn right onto the A15 — this can be a fast road but there is a good separate cycle path that will take you to Morton.

After Morton (you will need to join the road for a few hundred yards) carefully turn right to the towns of Dunsby and Dowsby along the B1177. You're in gentle rolling hills and will hit the heady

heights of about 26 metres above sea level.

In Dowsby, turn right along the B1397, and you're back on flat fen roads once more. The roads follow the field margins so there are some exciting right-angled turns to look out for.

You'll pass the settlements of Gosberton Clough, Gosberton Risegate and finally Gosberton itself — here, turn right onto the A152 for a short way, and at the roundabout take the second exit on the B1356 into Surfleet. Cross the River Glen (use the footbridge to the right if the traffic is busy on the narrow bridge) and follow this road through Pinchbeck and back into Spalding, where the road merges with the A151 and you can follow that right back to the station.

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The cover features a large red circle at the bottom left containing the text 'ONLY £4.99'. At the top, there's a banner with 'FREE!' and a list of features. The main title 'CYCLING Fitness' is in large, bold letters. Below it, a red circle contains 'NEW FITNESS TRENDS FOR 2015'. There are also sections for 'FOOD SWAPS', 'BE MORE AERO!', 'POWER METERS', and 'POST-RIDE STRETCHES'. A small inset shows the Spring 2015 issue of Cycling magazine.

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FEATURES

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Time Saving Stretches

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NUTRITION

The Great Big Breakfast Debate.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.... or is it?



Hooked on Classics

Less than two hours' drive from Calais, the cobbled climbs of the Tour of Flanders offer a perfect weekend of beer, chips and, of course, inspirational cycling

Words and Photos Tom Isitt

There is clearly something wrong with me. Something, somewhere in my head, needs a squirt of WD40, or some replacement bearings, or maybe a factory reset. I love cobbles, you see. From Coronation Street to the Carrefour de L'Arbre, I love them all. I can't help it. I just do.

Given the opportunity to escape the UK for a brief moment, my cycling friends head for sunnier climes and smooth roads. But not me. Oh, no. I head for the cobbled farm tracks of north-eastern France and Belgium; to ride in the wheeltracks of famous riders like Merckx, De Vlaeminck, Cancellara and Boonen.

I'm not a particularly hardcore cycle sport fan, but I do enjoy watching the pro riders on the TV and I love the Spring Classics, the single-day bike races such as the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix, that are contested by the hardmen of the sport. I love the spectacle and the history. There is a heroism to the Classics riders that sets them above the Grand Tour riders. And, at 184cm and 86kg, I



can more easily identify with the Classics riders than with some diminutive Columbian climber who weighs 60kg soaking wet.

Yes, I've done ridden Alpe d'Huez and the Stelvio, and derived immense satisfaction and inspiration from those ascents, but there is something about the Classics. They are a throwback to a more romantic age, when bike racing was more visceral and organic, when team tactics were less important than brute strength and technique. The men who flourished in the Classics were the work-hardened miners and farm labourers for whom cycling represented an escape. They raced for glory, but mostly they raced for money, and a way out of the grinding poverty into which they were born.

The Ronde van Vlaanderen (the Tour of Flanders) is probably my favourite bike race, combining the wind-blown flatlands of Western Flanders with the short, cobbled climbs around the little town of Oudenaarde. Of the 260km, the first 110km are a flat



softening-up process before the riders hit the 'bergs' and the race begins in earnest; watched by up to 800,000 baying fans.

Those bergs truly are the stuff of legend — the Koppenberg, the Paterberg, the Molenberg, the Oude Kwaremont. These short, tough, cobbled climbs have witnessed the extraordinary feats of history's greatest riders as they slugged it out in one of cycling's toughest races. And these iconic climbs are less than two hours' drive from Calais, making them much more accessible to UK riders than the Tour de France ascents of Mont Ventoux, the Tourmalet or Alpe d'Huez.

Riding the Ronde

Last year, in the company of my 20-year-old son Joe, I went in search of the Classics. In March we rode the final 110km of the Paris-Roubaix route, including 45km of horrendous French cobbles (*pavé*), and in September we rode our own version of the Ronde van Vlaanderen. I say "our own

version" because there is a Ronde van Vlaanderen Sportive in the spring that you can enter (along with 15,000 other people), but Joe and I don't really do sportives, and nor did we want to get stuck behind hundreds of people pushing their bikes up the Koppenberg.

I sat down with a copy of the excellent *Hellingen*, a guide to Belgium's greatest cycling climbs by Simon Warren (the man who wrote the *100 Greatest Cycling Climbs* books), and my online route planner of choice, and tried to plot a circular course from Oudenaarde that would take in as many of the renowned bergs as possible in one not-too-strenuous day. After much drawing, and redrawing, we had a route planned — a 50-mile clockwise route from Oudenaarde with 3,175ft of climbing that would incorporate 11 of the infamous hills that are regularly included in the Ronde.

Sadly this route doesn't include one of the most infamous climbs of the Ronde — the Muur (also known as the Kapelmuur). This was traditionally near the end of the race, but in 2012 the organisers moved the race finish to Oudenaarde and removed the Muur and the Bosberg from the race.

In late September we piled our bikes (Joe's Trek 1.5 and my Spin Spitfire MkIII) into the boot of our VW estate and headed for the Eurotunnel. From Calais, Oudenaarde is an easy 90-minute drive, and we arrived in time to check in at the Hotel Leopold and then head to the Centrum Ronde van Vlaanderen, a museum dedicated to the Tour of Flanders situated in the middle of the town. The museum is a must-see, and gives a wonderful sense of the history and drama of the race. But be warned: don't take your credit card anywhere near the museum shop, which is filled with the most fantastic collection of books, DVDs and clothing, unless you have iron self-control.

The day of our ride dawned warm and sunny... hardly typical weather for the Ronde, but we were delighted. Climbing 15 per cent gradients on wet cobbles isn't easy (in the very wet 1983 edition only two racers managed to ride to the top of the Koppenberg; everyone ➤

"The stones are big, unevenly jumbled, randomly spaced, and with a terrifyingly steep camber. It's so hard to keep any momentum going, and by the top I'm aware that I am whimpering slightly"

Tom & Joe's
YouTube footage:
[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=
waT8D6Ad3h8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waT8D6Ad3h8)

Grazing cattle complete a rural idyll on the back roads of Flanders

Amazing pace: natural windbreaks allow for a turn of speed



else walked!) and neither of us wanted to suffer any more than was absolutely necessary. With a relatively easy 50 miles and 3,000ft of climbing in front of us, and a whole day in which to do it, we made a leisurely start into the early autumn sunshine.

The first berg on our route, the now-smoothly-tarmacked Edelareberg, climbs south out of Oudenaarde at a gentle four per cent for a mile, a pleasant way to get the legs warmed up and ready for the cobbles that lie ahead. The first proper taste of our Ronde comes on the Taaierenberg, affectionately known as the Boonenberg because this is where Tom Boonen traditionally attacks. At 780m in length, and averaging 5.4 per cent, there is a brutally hard 18 per cent section, which reduces our speed to a crawl. Our bikes buck and bounce across the horrible surface, our hands struggle to grip the bars, our eyes shake in their sockets, and our legs grind slower and slower... The surface isn't as tough as the Roubaix pavé, but the combination of the cobbles and the gradient is really hard.

At the top I'm puffing like a good 'un, but at less than 1km in length the suffering is fairly short-lived. A word about the stats for these climbs: every book and website quotes something different, so I'm using Simon Warren's *Hellingen* as the definitive source.

The tiny country roads around here, often little more than concrete slabs the width of a car, cut through the rolling landscape and feel as smooth as silk by comparison with the cobbles. In the early autumn the fields are filled with ripening maize, offering a level of protection from the wind that you don't get in early April. We roll gently downhill for a mile or so until we reach the foot of the Eikenberg (1,250m long, average gradient five per cent, maximum 10 per cent), when it all begins again. As often seems to happen, my 'faux pro delusion' is shattered near the top when I struggle quite hard to overtake a meandering





local, riding to the shops on her 30kg Dutch bike. Damn you, Mrs Vos, slow down!

Ups and downs

Next up, after four miles of lovely, silky-smooth flat tarmac, is the Molenberg (450m long, average gradient 6.2 per cent, maximum 14 per cent). The relative ease of the Eikenberg has lulled us into a false sense of security, and as we pass the picturesque watermill at the bottom of the climb we are ill-prepared for what is about to happen. As we round the first

corner a wall of cobbles looms above us like a huge wave about to break over us. The stones are big, unevenly jumbled, randomly spaced, and with a terrifyingly steep camber. It's so hard to keep any momentum going, and by the top I'm aware that I am whimpering slightly and fully expecting Mrs Vos to come back past me.

In case you thought the Ronde only has cobbled climbs, it doesn't, it has flat cobbles as well; and next came the Haaghoek, a mile of flat punishment before launching up the smooth tarmacked ascent of the Leberg (960m, 3.5 per cent average, 13 per cent maximum). Three miles later comes another tarmacked climb — the relatively benign Valkenberg (1,000m, five per cent average, 13 per cent max) in the little town of Brakel.

At this point, 25 miles in, you can head east to Geraardsbergen to climb the Muur (adding an extra 12 miles to your day), or else turn south-west to Ronse. With a slight sense of regret we forsake the Muur (time, and magazine photography, wait for no man) and head for Ronse. It's a gruelling 3.5 per cent uphill slog for four miles before a lovely fast four-mile descent in Ronse.

Fortunately our arrival in Ronse coincides with lunchtime, so we find a restaurant in the middle of town and order the traditional cycling pick-me-up, the Pot Belge (painkillers, amphetamines, alcohol, cocaine, and heroin). Sadly the Pot Belge is off, so we carb-load with pasta instead.

Suitably replenished, we hit the Oude Kruisberg (845m, 6.5 per cent average, nine per cent max), a strange, leafy suburban road on the edge of town with fairly gentle cobbles. A five-mile stretch of tarmac gives our pasta time to settle, and then it is the three climbs I am most looking forward to: the Oude Kwaremont, the Paterberg and the Koppenberg — all in quick succession.

For many, these three climbs are the Ronde, and it is on these climbs that the



If you like killer climbs you'll love the Kwaremont

THIS WAY...

TRAVEL FACTS

EUROSTAR

Prices from £118 return on a Short Stay Saver tariff: www.eurotunnel.com/uk/home/

DRIVING

From the Calais Eurotunnel terminal take the A18 (E40) towards Bruges and then the A10 (E40) towards Ghent. From the outskirts of Ghent take the N40 south to Oudenaarde.

ACCOMMODATION

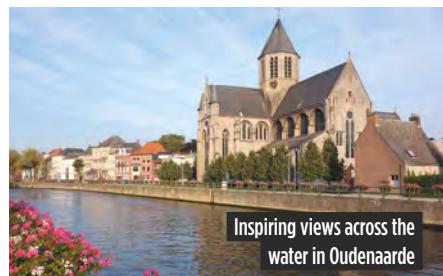
Hotel Leopold, De Ham, Oudenaarde (<http://gb.leopoldhoteloudenaarde.com>). Ample car parking, free wifi, central location, dedicated secure bike storage, excellent hotel. There are also numerous B&Bs along the route, and there is an accommodation-finder on the CRVV website (www.crvv.be/en/321-lodging).

PLACES TO VISIT

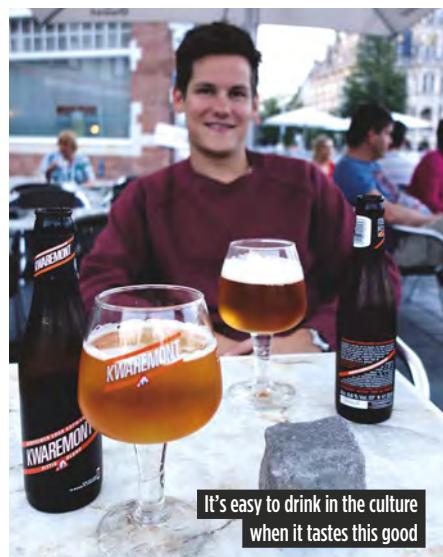
Centrum Ronde van Vlaanderen
www.crvv.be/en/292-tour-of-flanders-centre



Even the hotel foyer is dedicated to cycling history



Inspiring views across the water in Oudenaarde



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A smooth tarmac stretch offers
respite from the grind

likes of Merckx, Museeuw, Boonen and Cancellara have put their rivals to the sword. At 2,600m in length the Oude Kwaremont averages just 3.5 per cent and maxes out at 12 per cent. The stones are large and in reasonable condition most of the way up, but it's the sheer length of the climb that makes it hard — it just goes on and on and on. The climbs are pretty, edged by high embankments of grass and willow trees, and offer an elegant frame to your suffering.

Barely two miles from the top of the Oude Kwaremont comes the Paterberg, an astonishingly tough, dead straight 360m climb that averages 11.6 per cent and maxes out at 20. With a narrow 90-degree turn onto it, you can't carry any momentum onto the climb, so you just have to tough it out. The stones are in very good condition (it's an artificial climb, installed in 1986 by the local farmer who wanted some Ronde action on his land), so it's just a case of gritting your teeth and pounding up it as hard as you can go. Unlike most of the other, more organic bergs, the Paterberg is wide open and devoid of embankments or protection from the elements, adding to its unforgiving nature.

PREPARATION AND TECHNIQUE

- Fit 25mm or wider tyres, and take at least two spare inner tubes.
- Run tyre pressures lower than usual, but not so low as to get pinch-flats.
- No need to double-wrap handlebars or fit extra-grippy bottle cages.
- Give your bike a good once-over before you leave, and make sure everything is tightened and Loctited.
- If the cobbles are damp or wet, try to stay seated as far back on the saddle as you can, to maintain traction.
- Maintain a strong, steady cadence — not too fast, not too slow.
- Ride as quickly as you can — ‘floating’ over the cobbles at speed is more comfortable than bouncing off every single one of them.
- Maintain a relaxed grip on the bars, either the tops or the drops, and allow your arms to act as shock-absorbers.
- Keep your head up and look ahead for the smoothest (least lumpy) line.



Narrow lanes are made for
leisurely country jaunts

At this point, 43 miles down and with 2,750ft of climbing done, my legs are starting to suffer. The Paterberg has pretty much finished me off, and now I have a mere three miles in which to recover before the final climb — the Koppenberg. Joe, at 70kg and 30 years my junior, doesn't seem to be suffering in quite the same way.

And so to the Koppenberg (600m, 10.5 per cent average, 19 per cent max), so named because the original cobbles

resembled kinderkoppen (babies' heads). For me, this is the one. It combines the beauty of the Kwaremont with the brutality of the Paterberg, and was

considered so hard that it has been removed from the race on several occasions since its introduction in 1976.

It starts with a gentle cobbled slope between two fields, up towards a wooded escarpment. As you disappear into the trees the road rears up, hemmed in on both sides by steep banks. The surface is damp in this tunnel of trees, even in good weather, and the stones are horrendous. I find myself whimpering again as I struggle to maintain forward motion. The gradient eases slightly as you clear the trees, but not by much. Then we're at the top, gasping, shaking, freewheeling down the lovely, smooth, velvety tarmac that takes us back towards Oudenaarde, and a well-earned steak, chips and beer.

Sitting outside a bar in the delightful main square of Oudenaarde, sipping a Kwaremont beer, Joe and I reflect on the Ronde. We rode a paltry 80km of the 260km race in almost perfect conditions, and loved every minute of it. Compared to our Paris-Roubaix trip this was a breeze, and with every climb oozing history and drama, our mini-Ronde was hugely enjoyable. By all means put Alpe d'Huez on your bucket-list, but closer to home, more achievable, and every bit as fulfilling are the cobbled climbs of the Ronde van Vlaanderen. We may just have discovered the perfect cycling weekend break. End

Things to do March and April

The sun is out, birds singing, flowers blooming — let's hit the road!

Key to regions

	Scotland		NE North-East		E East
	N. Ireland		NW North-West		C Central
	Ireland		Y Yorkshire		SE South-East
	Isle of Man		EM East Midlands		S South
	Wales		WM West Midlands		SW South-West



Photos: Andy Jones, Rupert Fowler, Daniel Gould, Jon Brooke

SUNDAY MARCH 29

WEST SUSSEX BURGESS HILL SPRINGTIME CLASSIC

HQ Oakmeeds Community College, Burgess Hill RH

How far 36/54/71 miles

Entry £30/£35/£40

CA says Heading out around Sussex you'll venture into the open heathland of Ashdown Forest. Your fitness will be tested with the climbs of Kidds Hill, Pillow Mounds, Groombridge Hill and the 'cleat breaker' of Cob Lane Hill, a 20 per cent gradient that sees many riders off their bikes and walking.

@srsevents
www.srs-events.cc
FS/ET

YORKSHIRE NIDDERDALE SPORTIVE

HQ Dacre Banks, Dacre, Harrogate, HG3 4ES

How far 65/85 miles

Entry £25

CA says If you haven't ridden the roads that the 2014 Tour ventured over, then why not head to Yorkshire to do so? You can choose from 65 or 85 miles with 6,000 and 8,000ft of climbing respectively — so be sure to factor a little climbing into your training. Back at HQ a traditional pork pie with mushy peas will be waiting for you.

www.functionalfitnessevents.co.uk

SURREY SURREY HILLS

CYCLONE

HQ Friends Life, Dorking, RH4 1QA

How far 28/61/87 miles

Entry £25/£35

CA says A testing sportive for this time of year, as the routes take on some tough Surrey climbs. Even the short route takes on the gruelling 20 per cent gradient of White Down Lane. If you're up for taking on the longer distances, Leith Hill and Barhatch will be waiting for you. Don't forget your climbing legs.

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punish you for it. Cobbles and off-road sections have been known to face riders in past editions.

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FRIDAY APRIL 3

WILTSHIRE THE JOKER

HQ Salisbury Racecourse, Netherhampton, SP2 8TN

How far 60/150km

Entry £28/£30

CA says

With April Fool's day just around the corner, this sportive will be playing 'jokes' on you at most turns. There will be optional challenges, should you wish to choose them, built around hills and other challenges. But if you dare to take a short cut, the Joker could

be waiting for you. Cobbles and off-road sections have been known to face riders in past editions.

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haunted village — Pluckley — and skirt the coast near Hythe.
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SUNDAY APRIL 5

YORKSHIRE BLUE GIRAFFE BICYCLES NORTH YORK MOORS SPRING CLASSIC

HQ Stokesley Town Hall TS9 5DG
How far 30/56 miles
Entry £15/£20
CA says The first of the Blue Giraffe series will head out around the moors of North Yorkshire. There won't be much of a warm-up, as after just a few miles participants will take on Carlton Bank. It's then on to Newgate Bank to Helmsley for a nice flat section to spin the legs out. But don't get too comfortable — the hills keep coming as the route leads you onto the top of the moors. The short route is

mostly flat so if you don't fancy lots of climbing, this could be the one for you.
 @bluegiraffel
www.bluegiraffebicycles.co.uk
CF/FS/EM

LANCASHIRE PENDLE WITCHES VINTAGE VELO

HQ The Craven Heifer Public House, Rawtenstall, BB48LA
How far 13/56 miles
Entry £6.95/£16.95
CA says The Pendle Witches Vintage Velo is a favourite for those who enjoy steel bikes and traditional wool kit, but modern cycles and Lycra lovers are welcome too. The routes take on Lancashire moorland, meandering through the Ribble Valley and pushing over the Trough of Bowland.
www.pendlewitchesvintagevelo.co.uk
FS/ATC/EM

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE THE QUATTRO SPORTIVE

HQ Cogenhoe Football Club, Brafield Road, NN7 1ND
How far 52/75/84 miles
Entry £25/£27/£29

CA says This event is so-called as the 84-mile route travels through four counties: Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. All routes will travel on rural roads, through picturesque villages including Newton Blossomville, Kimbolton and Harrold. If you live nearby, why not get out and ride?
www.justracinguk.com/event/2014/quattro-sportive-0
FS/EM

MONDAY APRIL 6

WINCHESTER THE EXCLUSIVE SPORTIVE SERIES: LAINSTON HOUSE

HQ Lainston House Hotel, Sparsholt, SO21 2LT
How far 30/70/120km
Entry £35
CA says The first in this exclusive, three-event series. Each one leaves from an idyllic backdrop like Lainston House and offer luxuries such as gourmet food and massage. There is even a bird of prey display to keep your supporters entertained. From Sparsholt, the route heads north through Micheldever towards the North Wessex Downs.
 @cycletoursuk
www.cycletoursuk.com
FS/EM

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SANTINI COTSWOLD SPRING CLASSIC

HQ Cirencester College, Cirencester, GL7 1XA
How far 50/100/160km
Entry £28
CA says A three-day weekend is the perfect excuse to get a few extra miles in. Heading out around the Cotswolds, this route takes riders through golden, stone-built villages and across a range of rolling hills. New for this year are timed hill-climb sections including the long climb up Minchinhampton Common. You'll be given a well-earned Easter egg at the finish.
www.cotswoldsspringclassic.co.uk
FS/ET/EM

SATURDAY APRIL 11

LONDON THE OPEN WHEEL: LONDON BREAKFAST RIDE

HQ Gillet Square, Dalston, London, N16 8AZ
How far 20 miles
Entry Free
CA says Once a month, the guys at Open Wheel host free 20-mile breakfast rides around London. There is no timing or signage — these are more of a social ride, lead by locals — ideal for new riders and people who might not know London. Your 20-mile spin will end at a cafe, just in time for breakfast.
 @theopenwheel
www.theopenwheel.com/rides

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SPRING SPORTIVE

HQ Matchams Leisure Park, nr

Ringwood, BH24 2BT

How far 62/84 miles

Entry £33

CA says This popular event is already sold out for its Saturday date but you can still take on 62 or 84 miles on the Sunday. It's a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the New Forest National Park — just watch out for the free-roaming ponies, cattle and deer grazing on the roadside. If you've never ridden around the New Forest before, why not give it a try?

Twitter @ukcyclingevents

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM

SUNDAY APRIL 12**C BERKSHIRE GUIDE DOGS TOUR OF BERKSHIRE**

HQ Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Hillfields, RG7 3YG

How far 41.5/84/125km

Entry £18/£22/£26

CA says A well-planned event that ticks all the boxes. It takes in the attractive countryside around Berkshire, traditional villages, quiet lanes and the all-important testing climbs. You can even raise some much-needed funds for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association as you pedal.

Twitter @dengieevents

www.dengieevents.co.uk

CF/ET/FS/EOL/ATC/EM

SW DEVON HAMMER SPORTIVE!

HQ Salcombe Rugby Club, Salcombe, TQ8 8AX

How far 65/105/135km

Entry £25.99/£29.99

CA says All the routes travel around the South Hams and with a nod to the Spring Classics, there will be Belgian waffles on offer at the feed stations. The routes have some coastal terrain to take on at Dartmouth, a road used on the 2012 Tour of Britain. Save some energy for the finish up Sandhills Road — it's famous for its five hairpins.

www.hammersport.co.uk

CF/ET/FS/EOL/ATC/EM

Y YORKSHIRE MOORS AND SHORES ADVENTURE CROSS

HQ Dalby Forest, N. Yorkshire, YO18 7LT

How far 45/60 miles

Entry £25/£35

CA says The first in the *Cycling Weekly* Adventure Cross series in which each event goes over mixed terrain from forest to moorland tracks. Both the 45 and 60-mile routes start and finish at Dalby Forest, but remember, off-road miles always feel longer and tougher than those undertaken on the road. If you're going to take on one of these events you'll need a cyclo-cross or mountain bike.

Twitter @cyclingweekly

www.bookmyride.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/EM

**EM DERBYSHIRE RONDE VAN CHINLEY**

HQ Old Hall Inn & Paper Mill Inn, High Peak, SK23 6EJ

How far 52km

Entry £15

CA says A cycling club-organised event that pays homage to the professional races of the Spring Classics. From Chinley you will push around the Peak District National Park with a few uneven roads added in for a true Spring Classic experience. You'll finish back at the Paper Mill Inn where you can enjoy a beer and some food and watch the pros take on the real deal — Paris-Roubaix.

tinyurl.com/n6wkg4y

FS/ATC

WM WARWICKSHIRE SHAKESPEARE SPRING 100

HQ Stratford-upon-Avon Park & Ride, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 0RE

How far 50/100km

Entry £29

CA says Both these rides head out

around South Warwickshire with the longer 100km route dipping into Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. This event won't be timed but there will be some Strava route segments so you can harness your competitive nature, should you wish, and compete against your mates for the best time.

www.macride-events.org.uk

FS/ATC/EM

SE THE FOOL'S ERRAND IV: FOOL YOU MORE

HQ Hadlow College, Hadlow, TN11 0AL

How far 60/120km

Entry £15/£25

CA says If you decide to take on the longer 120km route, be prepared for a few surprises, as there will be twists and turns that will require you to keep your attention on the route ahead. The routes travel from Hadlow through East Malling, Stanstead, Riverhead and Shipbourne before looping back to HQ.

Twitter @Widehorizons_uk

www.widehorizons.org.uk/

thefoolserrand

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

NW CUMBRIA THE SHAP SPRING CLASSIC (PART OF THE LAKELAND CLASSIC SERIES)

HQ Coniston School, Coniston, LA21 8EW

How far 75 miles

Entry £25

CA says Traversing between the Lakes and the Pennines, there will be steady, gradual climbs with open views along this event's 75 miles. Over the course of

the ride, there will be 1,700m of total ascent across the Eden Valley and through the villages of Great Asby and King's Meaburn. There will be a final climb past Rosgill to the finish.

www.seismic-events.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

MON-SUN APRIL 13-19**SW DEVON DARTMOOR CYCLING CAMP**

HQ Believer Youth Hostel, PL20 6TU

How far Various

Entry £595

CA says A week-long UK sportive training camp across Dartmoor. There will be groups for every riding ability led by expert coaches. There will also be training seminars and skills sessions on things like nutrition and hydration, group riding, and stretching and recovery. This is something for riders serious about making progress.

Twitter @JustEventsLtd

www.Dartmoor.biz

CF/FS/EM

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SATURDAY APRIL 18
NW **LANCASHIRE THE OPEN WHEEL: WEST RIDING CLASSIC**

HQ Clapham Village Hall, Clapham, Lancaster, LA2 8EQ
How far 33/60/75 miles

Entry £26

CA says From the quaint village of Clapham the route moves from the edge of the Yorkshire Dales before entering them proper slightly further south at Settle. Heading north the 60 and 75 mile routes will turn back at Dent through Ingleton. Make sure to pick up some delicious homemade cake at the feed station.

 @theopenwheel
www.theopenwheel.com/rides
 FS/ET/ATC/EM

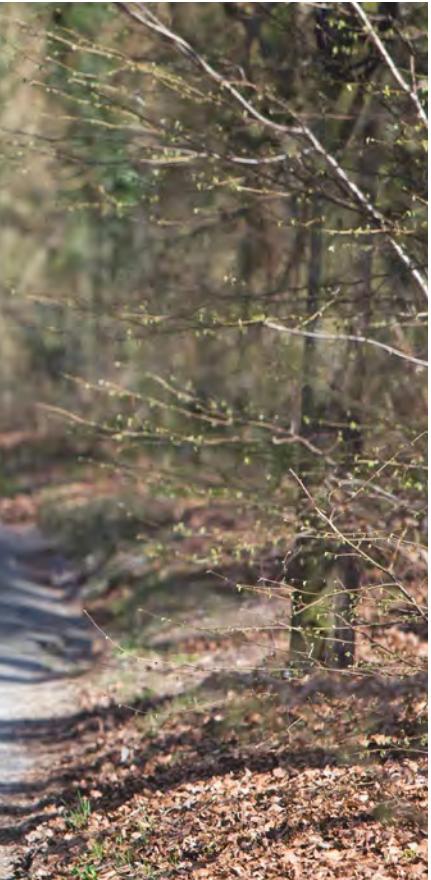
Y **YORKSHIRE VELO29-ALTURA DAFFODILS**

HQ Thirsk School, Thirsk, YO7 1RZ
How far 36/77/88 miles

Entry £15/£25

CA says This ride — with three routes available — kicks off the Velo 29 series of six events, and may be one for the botany specialists: it takes its name from the famous Farndale daffodils that the routes pass by. From Thirsk you'll enter North Yorkshire and take on the testing climb of Blakey Bank. If you're feeling strong, then you could try for a KoM on the Gilling Pub climb.

 @Velo29Eventscom
www.velo29events.com/sportives
 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

**SUNDAY APRIL 19**
E **CAMBRIDGESHIRE ACTION PETERBOROUGH 100**

HQ Marriott Hotel, Peterborough, PE2 6GB
How far 46/64/101 miles

Entry £55

CA says There are three distances to choose from around Cambridgeshire: 46, 64 or 100 miles. The routes are all planned on quiet lanes with some great climbs thrown in to keep your legs amused, but don't worry, it won't be a killer. This event is around the relatively flat Peterborough, after all, so there will be plenty of chances to recuperate.

www.action.org.uk/peterborough-100
 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SW **CORNWALL CORNWALL TOR**

HQ The Royal Cornwall Showground, Whitecross, PL27 7JE
How far 50/83/110 miles

Entry £30/£32/£35

CA says The talking point on this event is the infamous climb of Millook. This is a hilly part of the world but this climb is particularly tough. It's only short but the average grade is 15 per cent with a ramp that maxes out at 22 per cent just near the top. There will be some lovely coastal views along the way to take your mind off the pain in your legs.

www.kilotogo.com
 FS/EM/ET

E **NORFOLK COUNT THE COUNTIES**

HQ Lynnsport Leisure Park, Kings Lynn, PE30 2NB
How far 30/55/92 miles

Entry £14/£17/£20

CA says How many counties can you ride in one day? It depends how far you're willing to ride. The 30-mile route takes you through one; the 55 through two; and the 92-mile route through the three counties of Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. At the end of the ride, you complete a lap of the track at Kings Lynn before tucking into some post-ride grub with the welcome option of a celebratory pint at the bar.

 @cyclesportives
www.cyclesportivesuk.co.uk
 FS/EM/ET/EOL

C **HERTFORDSHIRE HERTS EASTER HUNT**

HQ Chancellor's School, Hatfield, AL9 7BN
How far 33/65/98 miles

Entry £18/£20

CA says The 98-mile route will be a true test of strength and stamina, although the hills aren't relentless and there will be some long, flat sections to help tick off the miles and allow your legs to recover. If you're not quite ready for that, there is a 33-mile route ideal for those new to sportives and a 65-mile route, too.

 @Sportive_UK
www.sportiveuk.co.uk
 CF/FS/ET/EM

SE **KENT VELO GIRLS SPORTIVE**

HQ Hilden Park Golf & Leisure Club, Hildenborough, TN11 8LX
How far 20/40/60 miles

Entry £25/£50

CA says Head out through the winding lanes of Kent and Surrey traversing the Kent Weald. If you've got the legs for 60 miles, you'll make it all the way out to the Ashdown Forest and get to tackle Kidd's Hill climb, also known as 'The Wall'. The tasty flapjack at the feed stations should be enough to keep you pedalling along.

tinyurl.com/nhbe9ws
 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SE **KENT ON YOUR BIKE**

HQ Riverside Leisure Area, Gravesend, DA12 2RL
How far 15/30/45 miles

Entry £20

CA says Now in its 29th year, this charity ride will leave from Gravesend promenade and gives cyclists the opportunity to raise money for a cause close to their heart. The routes are designed around the lanes of north Kent, with sections of Sustrans routes.

 @onyourbikeGsend
www.onyourbike.org.uk
 FS/ET/EM

designed by local cycling club, Team Torelli and all riders are welcome to join their annual sportive. They aren't leg-breakers and can be enjoyed by all abilities. Participants will ride across the Cheshire Plains, head through Delamere Forest near Chester and finish the loop skirting by Beeston Castle back to the HQ.

 @TeamTorelli
www.mcmsportive2015.blogspot.co.uk
 CF/FS/ET/EM

E **CAMBRIDGESHIRE WIGGLE SPRING SADDLE**

HQ Rowley Mile Racecourse, Newmarket, CB8 0TF
How far 38/73/100 miles

Entry £33

CA says This mostly flat and flowing course travels around the roads of Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Essex. You'll pass through villages on quiet lanes and zip past churches and rolling fields. With no real climbs to tackle, it's a good event to test out your legs after the winter.

 @ukcyclingevents
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
 CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM

SATURDAY APRIL 25
EM **LEICESTERSHIRE DARE 2B RUTLAND CICLE TOUR**

HQ Giant Store Rutland, Rutland Water South Shore, Normanton, LE15 8HD
How far 21/57/78/104 miles

Entry £20/£30

CA says Not only will you venture through Rutland, England's smallest county, but you'll also pedal through the neighbouring counties of Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. The longest route has a total of 1,524m climbing and includes some of the most scenic parts like Rutland Water, Vale of Belvoir and the viaduct at Harringworth.

 @itpcycling
www.itpevents.co.uk
 FS/ET/ATC/EM

SW **WALES TOUR OF PEMBROKESHIRE**

HQ Oriel y Parc, St. Davids, SA62 6NW
How far 50/75/100 miles

Entry £30/£35/£40

CA says Coast and mountain views provide the backdrop for this event. Heading along the coast, you will pass Abereiddi and Abercastle before heading into the Preseli Hills. The routes head north, with the 100-mile option reaching as far as Cardigan before looping back. There is an abundance of accommodation options in the area if you want to make a weekend of it.

 @pembstour
www.tourofpembrokeshire.co.uk
 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SUNDAY APRIL 26
WM **WARWICKSHIRE ACTION WARWICKSHIRE100**

HQ Stratford upon Avon Racecourse,



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How far 44/67/100 miles

Entry £55

CA says You'll head out around Shakespeare's homeland on this Action Medical ride. You'll sweep by canals and weave your way through quaint, picturesque villages all the while raising funds for sick babies and children. With a bit of training these challenging routes will push but not break you.
www.action.org.uk/warwickshire-100
 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SCOTLAND **ETAPE LOCH NESS**

HQ Inverness TBC

How far 66 miles

Entry Charity places available

CA says You might just spot the elusive Loch Ness monster as you complete a full circumnavigation of the large freshwater loch. The closed-road, 66-mile route will cross the Caledonian canal at Fort Augustus where riders will head into the surrounding hills for a timed climb.

 @EtapeLochNess

www.etapelochness.com

FS/ET/EM

WALES **GRAN FONDO CONWY**

HQ Conwy Quay, Conwy,
LL32 8BB

How far 42/70/104 miles

Entry £31.99/£35.99/£39.99

CA says From Conwy Castle the routes take in some famous landmarks including Llanrwst Bridge, the town of Denbigh and Llyn Brenig. Following the coastal roads there'll be views over the Irish Sea on the 42, 70 and 104-mile route options.

 @aahevents

www.granfondoconwy.com

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YORKSHIRE **HEART OF THE WOLDS SPORTIVE**

HQ Driffield Showground, East Yorkshire, YO25 9DN

How far 37/100/134km

Entry £20/£25

CA says This ride makes its way around the Yorkshire Wolds in its third year. With tough climbs come testing descents — so brush up on those bike handling skills. Alongside the valleys and chalk landscapes of the Wolds are ancient villages and market towns all waiting to be explored from the saddle.
www.woldssportive.co.uk
 CF/FS/ET

WALES **HERIO SPORTIVE**

HQ Coedkernew, Newport, NP10 8FZ
 How far 50km/120km

Entry £8/£18

CA says From Coedkernew the 50 and 120km distances take on a loop visiting Magor and Caerwent with the longer route heading into the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley. Back towards the HQ you'll pass over the River Usk at Caerleon and just by Bassaleg before hitting the finish line.

www.heriosportive.co.uk
 FS/ATC

SE KENT **KM BIG BIKE RIDE**

HQ Baypoint Club, Sandwich, CT13 9QL

How far 50/100km

Entry £30

CA says These two routes around the Kent coast and countryside are the finale to the Green Travel Festival. While riders make their way through the Sandwich and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve, supporters can enjoy live music, an all-day BBQ, activities and stalls at the ride HQ.
www.kmcharityteam.co.uk/challenge/bikeride
 CF/FS/ET/ATC

WM STAFFORDSHIRE **MOTION IN MERIA**

HQ Weston Park, Weston-under-Lizard, TF11 8LE

How far 51/74/108 miles

Entry £30/£32/£35

CA says Three route options taking in the splendours of Staffordshire and the West Midlands. Admire the springtime colours of Cannock Chase as you head round the Wrekin while on the longer routes you'll see Britain's first iron bridge, over the River Severn, at the unambiguously named Ironbridge.
www.kilotogo.com
 FS/EM/ET

C BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **ST GEORGE'S SPORTIVE**

HQ Princes Risborough School, Merton Rd, HP27 0DT

How far 78/112/133km

Entry £22/£23/£24

CA says With the Chilterns making an appearance, you can be guaranteed of challenging ride — just head to the

website to check out the saw-tooth profile. With spring in the air and the countryside in full bloom, the views should help take your mind off the hills.

 @cyclosportive
www.southernsportive.com
 FS/ET/ATC/EM

Y YORKSHIRE **RIDEIT NORTH YORK MOORS**

HQ Duncombe Park, Helmsley, YO62 5E
 How far 14/34/68/89 miles

Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says From Duncombe Park situated on the edge of the York Moors National Park, this Ridelt will take you into the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. White Horse Bank will be just one of a few climbs to test your early season legs.

www.evanscycles.com
 FS/EM/ET

E SUFFOLK **SUFFOLK SPORTIVE, ST ELIZABETH HOSPICE**

HQ Alton Water, Holbrook Rd, Stutton, IP9 2RY

How far 40/80 miles

Entry £25

CA says This sportive around the lanes of Suffolk has been set up to raise money for the St Elizabeth Hospice that provides specialist support to those with terminal illnesses. From the surroundings of the reservoir at Alton Water, participants can pedal around on 40 or 80-mile routes. There is even a 10-mile off-road family route.
tinyurl.com/o7e3dk5
 FS/ET/ATC

S OXFORDSHIRE **WHITE HORSE CHALLENGE**

HQ Viscountess Barrington's Memorial Hall, Shrivenham, SN6 8BL

How far 90 miles

Entry £30

CA says This event takes its name from the four white chalk horses you will pass on the route at Uffington, Broadtown, Cherhill and Hackpen. There's plenty more to see too. You'll encounter the historical Saxon town of Cricklade and picturesque villages of Hannington and Castle Eaton, with great views over the Marlborough Downs.
www.whitehorsechallenge.com
 FS/ET/ATC

SE SURREY **WIGGLE UPS AND DOWNS**

HQ Friends Life Building, Dorking, RH4 1QA

How far 36/80/102 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says The Surrey Hills and the North Downs are the stamping ground for this ride. You'll travel some of the route that the pros took in the men's road race of the 2012 Olympics and head up the hills of Pitch and White Down. You can treat your tired climbing legs to a massage back at HQ.

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www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
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Your turn

Rediscovering a rite of passage

Chicken pox turned out to be the catalyst Stuart Howard-Cofield needed to get into cycling

With the words, "You're in for a rough couple of weeks!" I was ushered out of the doctor's surgery through the back door, taking my newly acquired chicken pox — a gift from my daughter — with me.

Summer had arrived and I was to be stuck inside, hiding my blisters from the neighbours. What to do for the next week or so?

Idly flicking through the channels on TV, my finger paused as I spied the glorious overhead view of rolling fields. A fast-moving torrent of brightly coloured fabrics poured down a country lane, determinedly chasing a breakaway droplet. The Tour de France was in full flow. I was hooked.

I had watched sporadically before with mild interest; my father-in-law, forever glued to 24-hour sports channels, would often be watching the Tour, Vuelta a España or Giro d'Italia. I'd join him over a glass of wine and some inky squid or fresh anchovies, and we would discuss the passing scenery and stunning helicopter camerawork in a crude form of Spanglish.

There were also family visits to Spain in the earlier days of my wife and my courtship, punctured with the sound of mass sing-alongs to celebrate the victories of Miguel Indurain and me. "Indurain, Indurain, olé, olé, olé!"

My enforced isolation this time ensured that whole afternoons were spent watching the tactical battles being played out by the now disgraced Lance Armstrong and his team on the streets of France. But it took a while for my interest to be converted into energy powerful enough to get me off my backside and on to two wheels.

As a family, we moved away from the urban sprawl and incessant traffic of the city suburbs into hilly terrain. The regular sight of mountain bikes and road bikes passing and making their journeys to the bridleways and the byways that surround us, eventually spurred me into action.

Well, I am sure it would have done eventually, but the final push was the handing down to me of a heavy old 'bike shaped object'.

How had I gone so long without riding a bike? Every school holiday as a child was spent creating my own

courses during the 1980s obsession with BMX. Back then I was rarely out of the saddle.

The bicycle is at the heart of one of the most important rites of passage for any parent: buying and teaching your child how to ride. Yet somewhere along the way, many of us forget the joy that participating ourselves can bring — not to mention the obvious health benefits.

So, while daylight allowed, I quickly changed each night after work and rushed out to tackle the tarmac. Living at the bottom of the hill does not give you the best preparation to get your legs ready, but a short burst each night was a joy.

In the wheeltracks of legends

When feeling a little more adventurous, I'd cross the cobbles on to the bridleway, travelling further each time.

Then the kids had to have new bikes, of course; trips along the canal paths and around the park began to fill our weekend itineraries. Finally, as the winter started to close its icy grip, I slowed down. My wife was convinced that my growing obsession had abated. Not so.

The man responsible for handing me down the old bike, my brother-in-law, had been bitten by the cycling bug as well. He invested in a more lightweight road bike, and we have started to head out each weekend on short 10-mile blasts, me green with envy and huffing and puffing in his wake.

After months of poring over cycling magazines and endlessly comparing entry-level steeds (I can now bluff my way around derailleurs and gear ratios along with any pub bore — although my Strava stats

might leave a lot to be desired), I am now finally about to take the plunge and upgrade to a road bike. In preparation, I even bought my first padded Lycra shorts recently — surely an adult rite of passage?

To add to all the two-wheeled excitement and bring the story full circle, the Tour de France itself flashed by a corner of the village where we now live last July. As the peloton reached the end of the famous Cragg Vale ascent, it dipped into Lancashire (proud Yorkshiremen, avert your eyes!) at Blackstone Edge for barely a kilometre.

It may have only lasted mere minutes, but it was enough for a mass gathering of enthusiasts and interested locals to travel from Littleborough village, to the summit of Blackstone Edge, for a glance of the world's greatest bicycle race. At the bottom of the hill, there was a fair and the shops hung yellow bikes in celebration — there was a buzz about the place.

I can remember the feeling of pulling on a replica football shirt as a child and I can see my son with the same look of excitement when he does. For a few moments, the back garden becomes Old Trafford and the boy becomes his hero.

Only a chosen few ever get the chance to emulate their sporting heroes and play at Old Trafford. Yet, any day of the week we could slip on our cycling jerseys and within a few minutes be riding on the same roads as cycling's modern greats like Sir Bradley Wiggins, Chris Froome et al.

If I could just get up that hill...

Stuart Howard-Cofield is a freelance sports writer based in the South Pennines. He is the author of the football stories website grumpyoldfan.net



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